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No. 939
Friday
12 Dec. '97

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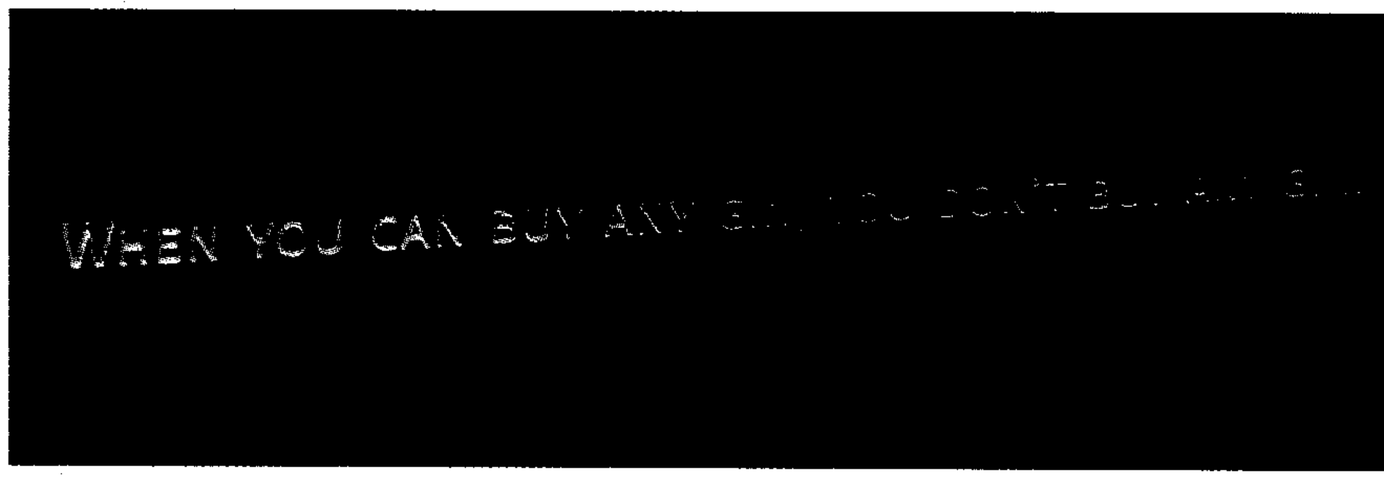

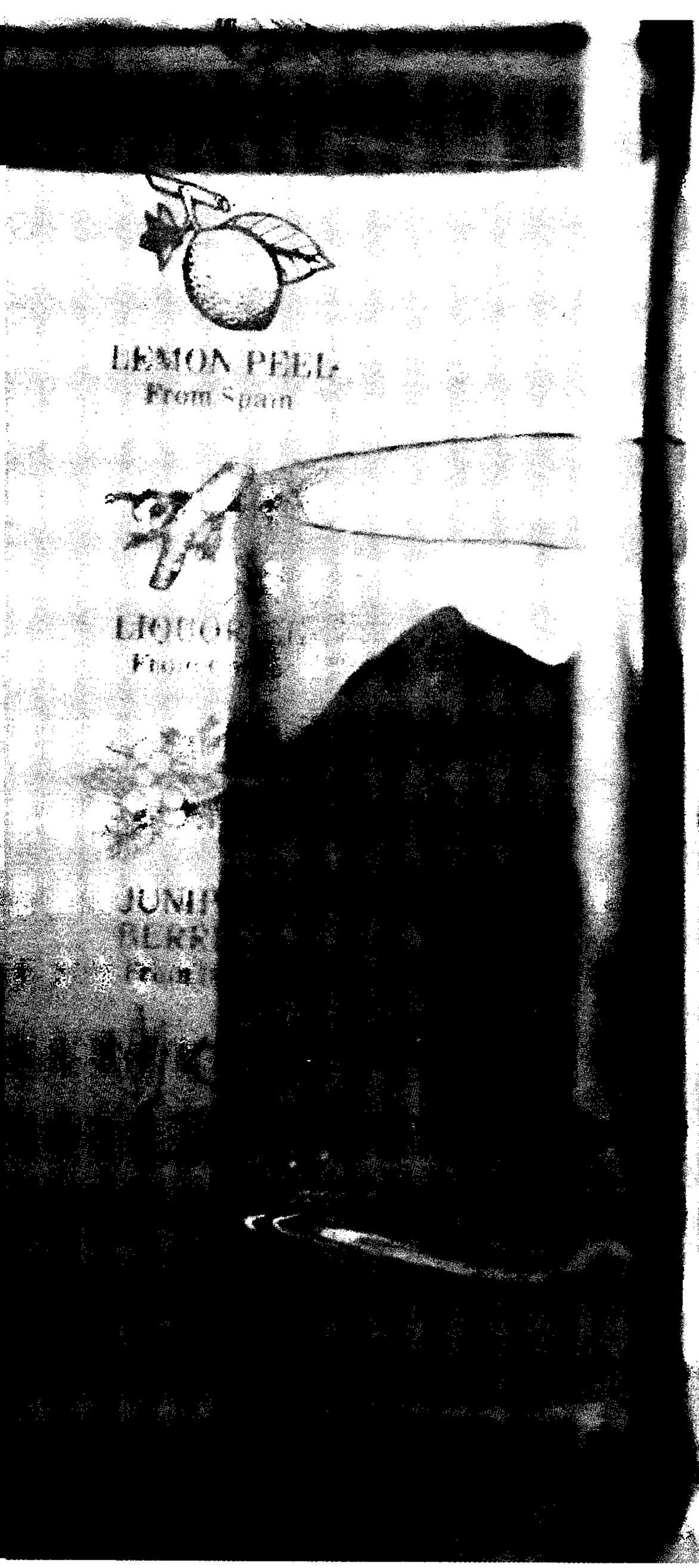

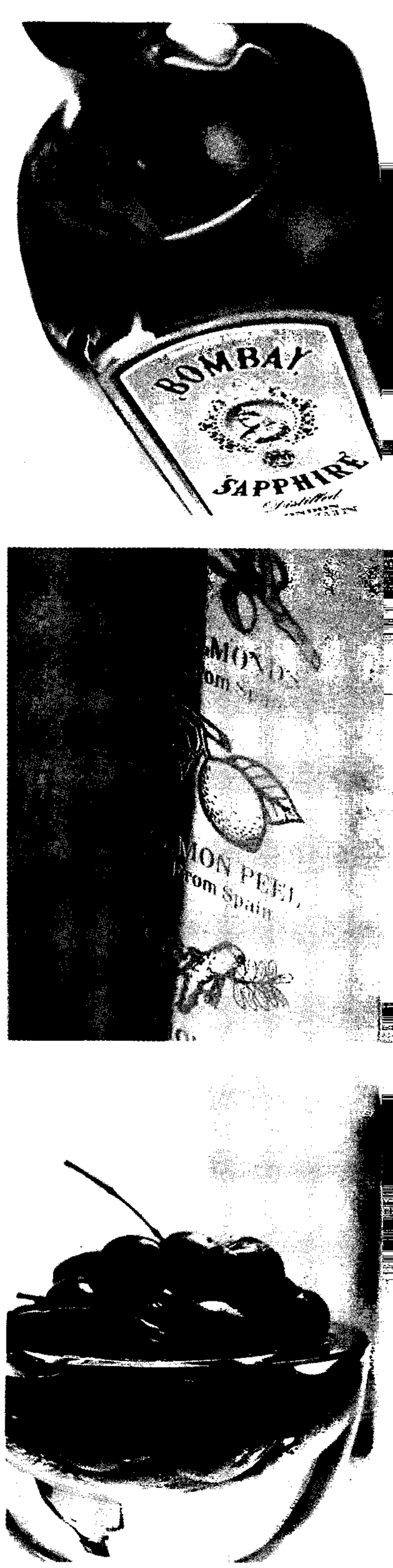

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Gnome

I HAVE been shocked and saddened to read reports of my relationship with Madame Joska Legovaire, the legendary Belgian beauty and hero of the Walloon resistance movement during World War Two.

It is true that my benefactress Mme Legovaire was a very close family friend, who, on her sad death in 1986, bequeathed to me her entire fortune of £30 million, including a Tuscan villa and flats and houses throughout the world. But any suggestion that my contacts with Mme Legovaire went beyond a purely business relationship are utterly preposterous and will lead to the issuing of writs should they continue.

Mme Legovaire left me her fortune purely and simply because she greatly admired my entrepreneurial skill in the field of second-hand cars, as manager of Gnome Motors (Coventry) Ltd. I would further add that my bequest has been very properly invested in the Grand Cayman Islands, where I have often spent long and happy holidays, where the money is being held in a "blind trust", administered by a group of wholly independent trustees of whom I do not even know the names — namely Mr E. Strobes, Ms Rita Chevrolet and myself (no relation).

E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome
Banque des Bonqueurs
Guernsey – Bermuda – Neasden

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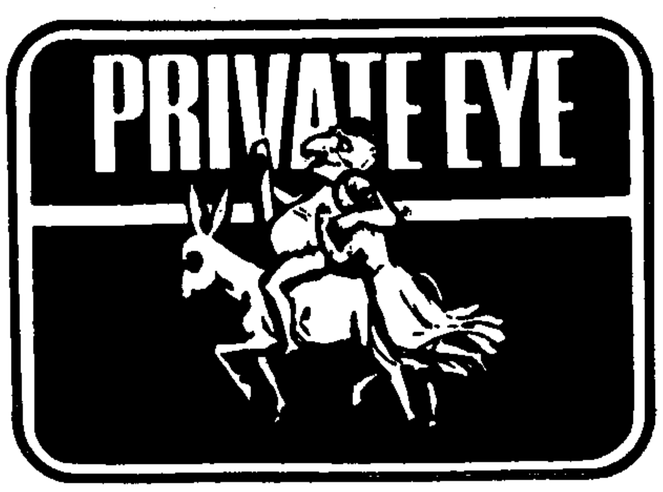
Give PRIVATE EYE for Christmas — see back cover



COLOUR SECTION

HEARTWARMING CHRISTMAS SHORT STORY

AT THE annual Christmas party for children of lobby hacks last week, the "surprise mystery guest" turned out to be Peter Mandelson — who was immediately asked for his autograph by the 10-year-old daughter of political hackette Julia Langdon.

Did he reward her with festive cheer and seasonal goodwill? Er, no. "Tell your mother she'd better start writing more positively about the government — or else," snarled the Santa Without Portfolio.

IGNORING Gordon Brown's appeal for pay restraint, City dealers have awarded themselves a record £1bn in Christmas bonuses — as against a mere £750m last year.

Christmas will be particularly merry in the London office of Goldman Sachs, where more than 100 executives will receive at least £1m each, and the 38 partners will get "several times that amount".

When news of the bonanza broke last week the Iron Chancellor might have been expected to issue an immediate condemnation of this awesome greed. So far, however, he has been strangely muted.

No doubt this is entirely unrelated to the fact that one of "new" Labour's favourite moneymen, Gavyn Davies, is both a senior partner and chief international economist at Goldman Sachs — or that his lucky wife Sue Nye happens to be the political secretary to the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP.

THE Tory press is confused by the Geoffrey Robinson affair. On the one hand the hacks can't contain their admiration for enormous wealth; on the other hand the chap is Labour and obviously a bounder.

One result of the contradiction is the universal belief that Robinson was a brilliant businessmen whose career in the British car industry is without reproof. Not so. Robinson, when he was at the top, was effectively sacked twice.

He was sacked as Jaguar boss in the 1970s after an awkward argument about a contract for a paint shop; and in 1994 he was sacked as chief executive of the engineering combine Transtec when the company under his leadership had replaced profits of £11m with losses of £12.4m (for details see *Eye* 907).

The newspapers have been a little coy, too, about the business career of Robinson's close friend Madame Bourgeois, who left him his fortune. The dynamic Madame spent her last years in Switzerland to avoid paying tax in her native Belgium. Her Belgian funeral, arranged by Robinson, is described by mourners as "the quickest ever", largely because so many of her closest friends were tax exiles too and needed to make their visits to their native country swift enough to avoid graveside arrests.

IN a week when he waxed eloquent denying stories about his lord and master Mohamed Fayed, Harrods director Michael Cole had nothing to say about the astonishing story in the last *Eye* about Fayed and the former Tory minister Michael Portillo.

The *Eye* revealed that Fayed had an Essex private detective and a former police photographer secretly follow and bug Portillo while he was secretary of state for defence. The intention was to gather information which might damage the secretary of state and his government, against which Fayed was carrying out an intense vendetta.

Curious corroboration of the *Eye* story comes from the final issue earlier this year of a magazine called *Spiked*. Fayed had teamed up with Felix Dennis, of Dennis Publishing, to finance *Spiked*, whose main purpose was to spread usually untrue stories about the government. In its last issue before its editor Angus James was killed in a Cyprus road accident, *Spiked* printed a story about Portillo and his visit to a house in Berkshire. The story corresponded almost exactly with the information gleaned by Fayed's bugging and tailing operation. There was even a picture of a car, alleged to be Portillo's, outside the Berkshire house Portillo visited. The picture was taken by the former police photographer who was part of Fayed's surveillance team.

It has always been known that Fayed was prepared to indemnify the printers and distributors of *Spiked* against libel. It was not known until now that Fayed was providing the libels himself as part of his grand campaign against the government.

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NEWSFLASH: Roger Ward, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, has taken "indefinite leave" pending an inquiry into his business associations extensively reported in the last four issues of the *Eye*. For latest instalment, see Footnotes, P28.

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"No one wants cows. Can you do a Pantomime Quiche?"

More news on page 7

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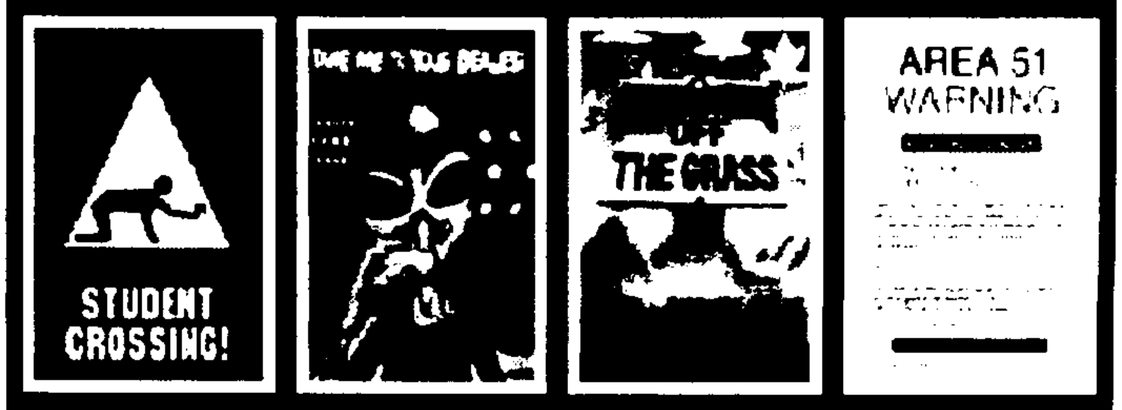

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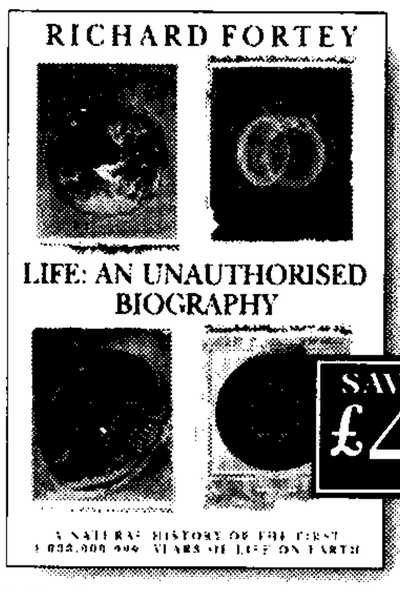
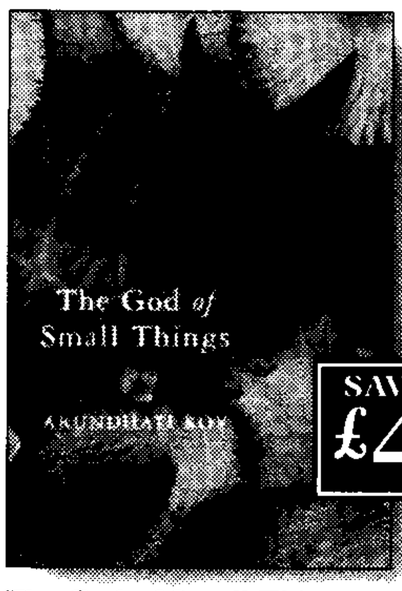


Life: An Unauthorised Biography
Richard Fortey (HarperCollins)
Publisher's rrp: ~~£20.00~~
Blackwell's price: £15.99



The God of Small Things
Arundhati Roy (Flamingo)
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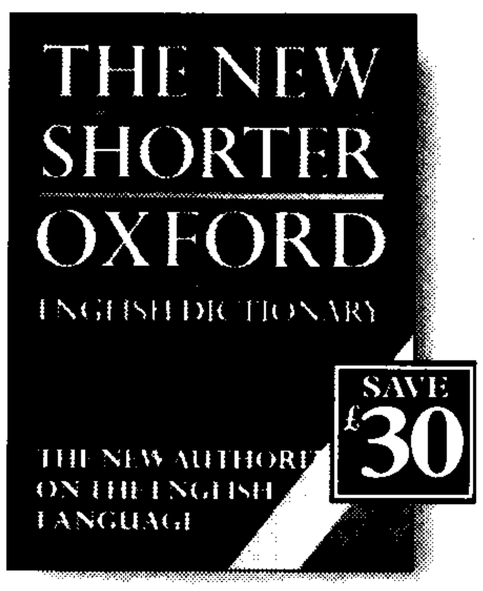

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. (OUP)
Publisher's rrp: ~~£80.00~~
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Ian Stewart (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)
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NEWS

MORE FAYED

MOHAMED FAYED always complains about the 1986 DTI report branding him a liar. But what of the inspectors' evidence that he was also a blackmailer?

The DTI inspectors visited Dubai where Fayed jointly owned an agency company with European partners. There the inspectors heard on good authority the following story.

An executive of the company often travelled to London to report to Fayed. He would he handed what is now known as "a Hamilton", a brown envelope packed with thousands of pounds in crisp new tenners. At first the executive wanted to give the money back, but Fayed persuaded him it was a bonus. He took the money but reported every penny to his European bosses.

Some time later the Europeans fell out with Fayed and parted company with him. Enraged, Fayed denounced the employee as corrupt and produced to the partners precise documentary evidence of the payments. Alas the partners had to explain to the foaming pharaoh that they knew all about his bribes already.

Though they had chapter and verse for this story, the inspectors did not include it in their report.

WATER SURPRISE

YORKSHIRE Water's efforts to woo disgruntled customers will not be helped by its application for planning permission for a luxury detached house on land it owns at Alwoodley.

The company's property arm, Yorkshire Water Estates, which has made the application to Leeds city council, wants to flog the land with planning permission. Any development, however, would disregard a woodland tree preservation order on numerous species at the site, which contains the source of the Adel Beck, a natural spring system forming a tributary of the River Aire.

Campaigners believe that city councillors have been misinformed about the application: initially they were told that only four trees needed to be removed, but many more would be destroyed by building. Letters of objection from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust were also left out of briefing papers.

More curiously, even though planning permission has yet to be granted, the site was advertised in the press as a "large plot of land for sale with planning permission". West Yorkshire trading standards declined to interfere, saying the misdescription should be dealt with by the water regulator Ofwat... and Ofwat said it had no remit over Yorkshire Water Estates as it is a subsidiary.

Locals hope permission will be turned down when it comes before Leeds East planners on 19 December.

● Paymaster general Geoffrey Robinson is not at all worried by reports of increasing water shortages, especially in the home counties. He has applied for a licence to extract 100 cubic metres of water (about enough to fill a large swimming pool) *every day* from "the Greensands" in his spacious grounds. "The water," explains his faithful retainer Stephen Usher, "will be used for irrigating and maintaining the gardens and tree planting associated with The Orchards." No one in Surrey has the slightest doubt the application will be granted.

"Incredible – policemen sitting for 60 minutes without getting suspended"

LORD LAIRGOVER

LORD Irvine of Lairg, who once employed Tony Blair and Cherie Booth in his chambers, is rapidly emerging as the most arrogant lord chancellor in living memory. But even those who are accustomed to Derry Irvine's self-importance were taken aback by his recent suggestion that he is a latter-day Cardinal Wolsey.

As far as we can discover, Wolsey did not make a habit of firing off petulant, bullying letters to newspapers. Last month, as the *Eye* reported, Irvine extracted a grovelling apology from a legal magazine which had published the scandalous allegation that he was a member of "new" Labour's "Tuscany set". And when the *Sunday Times* drew attention to the vastly expensive redecorations at the lord chancellor's residence — and the fact that Irvine had run off with the wife of his cabinet colleague Donald Dewar — his lordship despatched a 2,400-word letter of complaint to the paper's editor John Witherow.

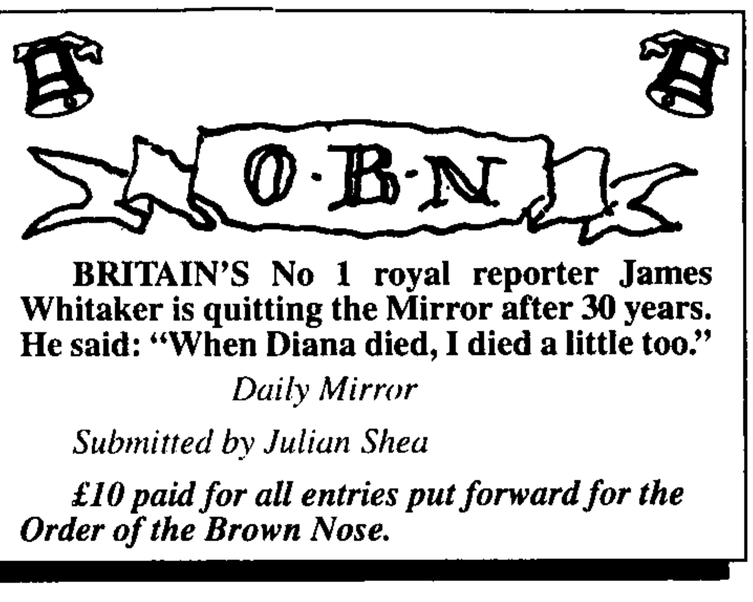
"This letter is not for publication," he warned Witherow. "I trust you will put it in your library and ensure that it is brought to the attention of any other journalist minded to write about me for you. I have also sent a copy to the editors of other major national newspapers so that it can be put in their libraries and made available to their journalists."

Quite why it shouldn't be "made available" to the public is not explained: perhaps Irvine realises that such a tedious and pompous document would not improve his reputation. Still, it does have one or two points of interest — notably Irvine's insistence that Dewar has no hard feelings over the loss of his wife.

"Some sections of the press, now sadly including yourselves, want to report the fact that my wife, Alison, left Donald for me 25 years ago in 1972, a fact which in itself is today of no legitimate public interest, by seeking to manufacture a contemporary public interest by asserting that these events of a quarter of a century ago adversely affect our relations as Cabinet ministers today. These allegations are made without either of us ever being asked whether there is any truth in them. There is none. Donald and I are good colleagues and on friendly terms."

His charm doesn't work on everyone, however — especially after he's been enjoying some seasonal hospitality. At a private party two weeks ago, a relaxed Irvine lurched up to a group of fellow guests and demanded: "Do you know who I am?" They did not, so he tried to enlighten them — but had some trouble getting the words out. "I'm Derry, Derry-uh, Derry-oh..."

"Ah!" one guest interjected helpfully. "You're called *Dario*. Are you Italian?" Whereupon the furious lord high chancellor stormed off in search of other guests who might be more awestruck by his magnificence.



BRITAIN'S No 1 royal reporter James Whitaker is quitting the Mirror after 30 years. He said: "When Diana died, I died a little too."

Daily Mirror

Submitted by Julian Shea

£10 paid for all entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

BRANSON PICKLE

DURING a recent *World in Action* Richard Branson demanded a total ban on tobacco advertising following the Formula One fiasco. But this seems not to apply to Virgin Radio, where advertisements for cigars can still be heard regularly.

Perhaps Branson has some difficulty in distinguishing between what is and what isn't tobacco. For all his loud fulminations about the evils of smoking, the Virgin boss is not above cadging the odd cigarette himself — particularly from hacks who come to interview him.

"Old McDonald had a farm... BSE, I, E, I, O..."

DOWN ON THE FARM

And an udder thing...

WHEN Merseyside farmers halted a 40-tonne refrigerated truck leaving an Irish ferry, they were fascinated by its contents. The boxes were destined for the main processing plant of a leading beefburger chain and were labelled "Irish beef" — yet documents showed their contents to be cows' udders from Germany.

This was interesting on more than one count. First, the company in question boasts that its burgers are made only from "prime beef". It is doubtful if many customers are aware, as they bite into their greasy buns, that they are in fact chewing the udders of Westphalian cows.

More pertinent is what this reveals about the scams being dreamed up to exploit the disaster currently pushing the British beef industry to the verge of extinction. Key to the disaster is the British government's refusal to take up nearly £1bn-worth of EU subsidies which are available to cushion Britain's already-reeling beef farmers against the effects of a strong pound. This means that highly-subsidised Irish farmers can now flood the British market with hundreds of thousands of tonnes of beef at prices way below anything British farmers can charge.

Domestic prices in Britain have collapsed to the point where no British beef farmer can sell his cattle except at a loss. Meanwhile, as supermarkets rush to buy at knockdown prices from Ireland, it even pays continental meat exporters to send their meat to Ireland to be relabelled and sent back across the Irish Sea to join in the bonanza.

It is not without interest to see the curious role played in this disaster by those two great champions of the European Union, the BBC and the National Farmers' Union. As angry British farmers blockade the ports, the Brussels Broadcasting Corporation goes out of its way *not* to explain just why those "cheap Irish beef imports" are so cheap. Meanwhile it regularly wheels on "farmers' leaders" like the appalling Sir David Naish and his Welsh sidekick Bob Parry, not to explain why farmers are so desperate but simply to tell them not to rock the boat of the "single market".

Hearing Sue MacGregor almost screaming at the EU's single market commissioner Mario Monti to "do something" to stop these awful British farmers holding up cross-border trade, one recalled how we never heard such pleas from the *Today* programme when French lorry drivers were recently inflicting far more damage on EU trade — any more than *Today* explains why the British government has failed to preserve that famous "level playing field" for our own farmers to the point where the rigging of the market is now pushing them towards extinction.

The last straw was the eagerness with which in the middle of the crisis the "Mad Doctor" John Cunningham rushed to ban T-bone steaks, prime ribs and oxtails on the basis of a report suggesting that there might just be a "1-in-20" chance that next year one person in Britain might just catch CJD. It is true that the British public have for once reacted with incredulous scorn as they rush out to fill their freezers with every T-Bone steak and rib of beef in sight. But it was hard to persuade those desperate farmers, as they waited in the rain and cold to make their point on the docksides, that this wasn't just another piece of the hidden agenda being clicked into place by a man who seems hand-picked as the minister to produce "the final solution" to "ze problem of British agriculture".

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

THE Fleet Street media pack in Cape Town was running frantically after the warring Spencers and their hangers-on, desperately waving chequebooks. But for once the venal pair were not interested.

The *Mail on Sunday* — new champion of not invading distressed persons' privacy — made it known it was prepared to pay Lady Spencer up to £250,000 for her exclusive story. Although this was the exact figure she had been asking for (unsuccessfully) from *Hello!* only 18 months ago, Victoria turned it down flat. Even she realised this could seriously jeopardise her potentially lucrative divorce settlement.

The *MoS* then turned its attention to her boyfriend, 27-year-old Guy Woods, dangling the possibility of £50,000. Although this amounts to a mountain of rands in South Africa, he honourably turned it down. So, finally, it offered a virtually open cheque book to Charlie's on-off girlfriend, former Calvin Klein model Josie Borain. Her reaction was made clear when she was heard giggling about it with Lord Charlie over lunch at the Mount Nelson Hotel (afternoon tea: £18).

As the court evidence revealed, his lordship still dwells at the other end of the moral spectrum from the gutter press.

THE Spencer divorce gave Charles Moore, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, several headaches.

Moore had castigated the tabloids in general, and the *Daily Mail* in particular, over their intrusion into private family matters after the death of Diana. But he couldn't fail to report the lurid details of the War of the Spencers to his salivating readers.

However, despite the fact that the *Telegraph* has a permanent South African correspondent, Alec Russell, and also has Christopher Lockwood, brother of Victoria Spencer, on its staff, the broadsheet still failed to cover the story properly.

Russell was in Johannesburg reporting on the appearance of Winnie Mandela before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and he was reluctant to leave a proper story to cover the infidelities of a blue-blooded marriage. By the time he could be persuaded to go to Cape Town for the court battle, the rest of the pack had left the *Telegraph* far behind.

In desperation, the Spencer story in the *Torygraph*'s Tuesday edition had to be rewritten using the *Sun*, Press Association reports and coverage from Moore's bete-noire — the intrusive and detestable... *Daily Mail*.

PAULA YATES, after an initial outburst against Bob Geldof on the plane on the way to the funeral, has maintained a public silence and refused to talk to the press about her bereavement. Instead she has sold the exclusive story to *Hello!* magazine for £500,000.

"IS THIS THE SICKEST XMAS GIFT OF ALL?" demanded the *News of the World* two weeks ago as it revealed that Harrods was selling a "tacky" doll of Princess Diana in a replica of her wedding dress, at the "fancy price-tag" of £39.95.

No doubt this sick souvenir is quite unrelated to the item advertised on a full page of the *News of the Screws* magazine the very same day — an equally tacky doll of Princess Diana in a replica of the blue velvet ballgown "which she wore to meet the President of the United States", at the even more fancy price of £95 each.

THE *Sunday Mirror* shocked even hardened Fleet Street spendthrifts when it offered £190,000 for publication of the "diaries" of two of Diana's junior hair stylists, Natalie from Chigwell and Tess from Cricklewood.

But now, it seems, the rag may try to weasel out of paying. A stop has been put on the cheque as the girls are to be sued for breach of confidentially by Daniel Galvin, Diana's crimper. The Essex girls' defence is that Diana had given them permission to talk. Unfortunately for them a number of the late Princess of Wales's staff have signed affidavits to the effect that this is not the case.

Meanwhile the empire of *Sunday Mirror* editor Bridget "Death" Rowe may at last be crumbling (see last *Eye*). The *Mirror*'s embarrassing deputy editor, the legendary Brendon "Chucky" Parsons, is believed to be about to take over at the *People*, leaving "Death" with just the *Sunday Mirror* to edit.

***MIRROR* chief executive David Montgomery, hit by pisspoor "financial performances" from the *Independent* and *L!VE TV*, is desperate to clinch a proposed £300m acquisition of Midland Independent Newspapers.**

The first hurdle was cleared in October when the government gave the go-ahead. The second was a vote by *Mirror* shareholders, and many of them were stunned to be summoned to this a fortnight ago — at 10 am.

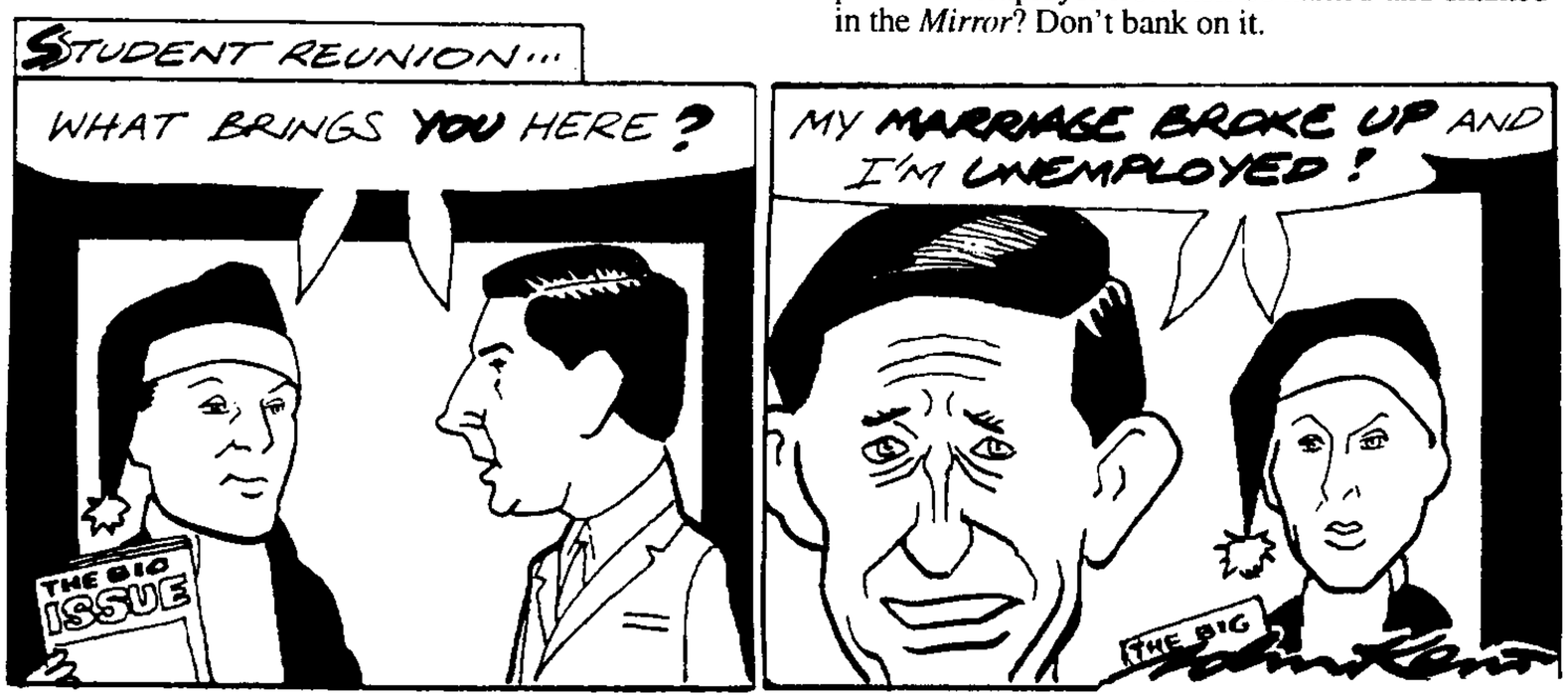
At 9.55am the company secretary ushered 10 to 15 loyal shareholders into a large hall at Cabot Lodge, Canary Wharf. Here they were almost outnumbered by members of the Mirror Group Board and the five receptionists. When asked if there were any questions, an Asian woman, who identified herself as a small shareholder, announced that she was very upset. "I had to get up at 5am to get here," she said. "Why couldn't the meeting have been at 11 like the agm?"

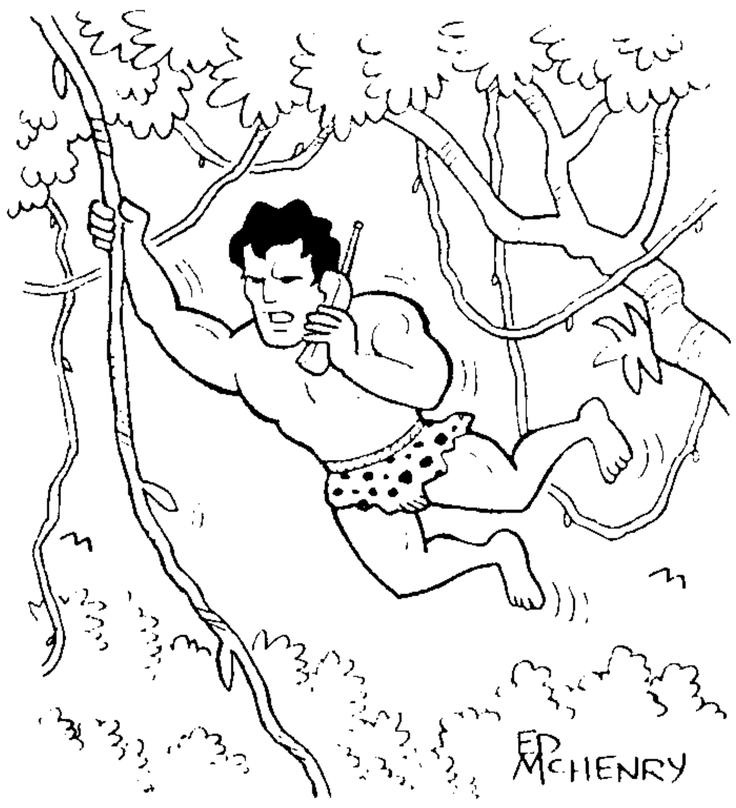
Chairman (and Maxwell appointee) Sir Robert Clarke mumbled that they would take this into account. Then a vote was called, with nearly all in favour. There was one abstention — a woman who could not find her card in time before the assembly was declared over. The meeting closed at precisely 10.04am.

As this tiny band of early-risers left the hall, they passed far greater numbers trying to get in: *Mirror* shareholders, furious to discover they were too late to vote on this important issue.

Still, when the TUC launched its "Britain's Worst Bosses" hotline on 1 December, the *Mirror* did give it a good plug, adding that it would "print details of the bosses from hell".

Could this be the same Mirror Group that three months ago sacked three union officers who dared speak up for downtrodden hacks? And will this particular employer from hell be named-and-shamed in the *Mirror*? Don't bank on it.





"Jane, darling, I'm just on my way home. I shouldn't be too late..."

ITV'S Christmas morning viewing, as listed in the *News of the World*'s comprehensive "56 page Xmas TV Guide" contains a few surprises: "10.55: To Be Announced, 12.00: To Be Announced, 1.45: ITN News, 2.00: To Be Announced, 2.30: To Be Announced, 3.00: The Queen". So too do 131 other slots on all four terrestrial channels that didn't make it into the *Screws*' bumper package.

***SPECTATOR* political editor Bruce "Brute" Anderson was in splendid form at his own magazine's Sávoy hooley, magnificently insulting Lauren Booth, Cherie's glamorous half-sister.**

Lauren, naturally, opposes fox hunting and soon became embroiled in a heated altercation with "Brute". The row rapidly became disturbingly acrimonious, and although Lauren impressed the watching editor, Frank Johnson, sufficiently for him to commission her as a diarist, she decided that she had better leave the party before Bruce went too mad.

Lovely Lauren is rapidly becoming the Terry Major-Ball of the Labour era. She has even popped up in *OK!* magazine, interviewing the Duchess of Freebiana. Lauren attends every available party and was recently pictured with Simply Red star Mick Hucknell. The dim *Express*, sniffing romance, sent a hack to track down single-girl Lauren, who yelled at the wretched hack through her letterbox: "Do you think I've got Mickey under the bed, or what?"

RICHARD "Monk" Addis, editor of the plummeting *Express*, has proved himself a true Santa.

Having "shed" showbiz hack William Sitwell in the summer, he has rehired him to perform amusing, Rory Bremner-style impersonations of executives at the staff Christmas party (at Kensington's Polish Club, entrance: £15). What Addis may not know is that Sitwell's star turn is a particularly piquant piss-take of... one Richard Addis.

Meanwhile the editor has also summarily sacked Steve "Nimrats" Martin, a loutish hack of the old school and editor of the *Express*'s international edition, after receiving a letter from a young black journalist describing the sexual and racial harassment to which Martin had subjected her.

The disgusting "Nimrats", whose boozy adventures have long been chronicled in the *Eye*, is now threatening to sue for unfair dismissal. It should be an interesting case: Martin had already been given two formal written warnings about his "hands-on" approach to female staff.

ANTHONY HILTON, city editor of the *Evening Standard*, leaps to the defence of the stock exchange's new trading system (SETS) against critics who say it is open to abuse.

CARPING OVER SETS PLAYS INTO HANDS OF CITY RIVALS was his headline on 3 December. In the long article which followed, Hilton forgot to mention that he is a consultant to the stock exchange's new glossy magazine, *Exchange*.

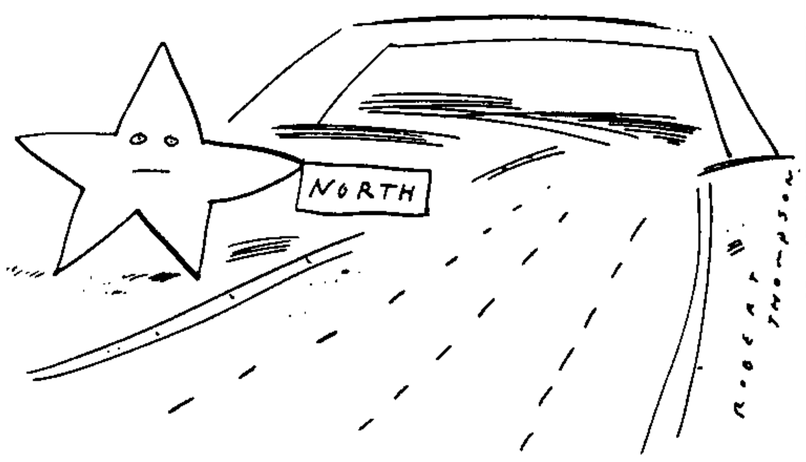
WHAT should a reputable newspaper do when it learns that a company with which it has no connection has fabricated an endorsement by its editorial staff? Er, it depends how much the errant company spends on advertising.

Goldshield Healthcare Direct sells vitamin and food supplements by mail order, using newspaper ads and mailshots. Over the summer it sent out a vast quantity of junk mail including an article allegedly reproduced from the 22 July edition of the *Daily Mail*.

The article praised Goldshield's Garlic Hi-strength tablets, but in fact no such article had ever appeared: Goldshield had simply booked an ad in the Mail and pretended the ad was an editorial endorsement in its subsequent mailshots.

Naturally the *Mail* was upset by this blatant deception — but not so upset it turned away the lucrative ads Goldshield continues to book in the paper. Instead it settled for a laughable "correction notice" to be included in Goldshield's next junk mailing: "...this gave the impression that the *Daily Mail* had written favourably about the tablets and had endorsed the product. This is not the case... We are sorry for the misleading impression given and have apologised to the *Daily Mail*".

Meanwhile the Advertising Standards Association, which regulates press ads but not mailshots, has upheld complaints relating to three separate Goldshield ads. Obviously the *Mail* couldn't care less about doing business with a company which such bogus claims as long as it can pay for its ads.



FATHERS & SONS

JONATHAN HARMSWORTH, Lord Rothermere's boy, has risen rapidly without trace to be appointed managing director of his father's *Evening Standard*. But hacks on the paper are terrified that Jonathan, 30, will now throw his weight about to prove that just because he's achieved zero of note so far, does not mean he's not another brilliant chip off the old blockhead.

Most nervous of all is Londoner's Diary editor Sebastian Shakespeare, who is also a friend of the new managing director — and, more alarmingly, his regular tennis opponent. Shakespeare, a whiz on court, is finding it increasingly hard to invent new ways of losing convincingly to his new boss, the future Lord Rothermere.

THE *Torygraph*'s Peterborough column ran an item on the dashing son of former MP Sir Michael Grylls, Edward — "known to all as Bear" — who had just become the youngest Briton to climb the Ama Dablam peak in the Himalayas.

But the grinning face in the accompanying photo rang a bell with the owners of a light aircraft in Compton Abbas, Dorset, who filled out an "occurrence report" to the civil aviation authority after they saw a young man and a female companion climbing into the airplane when it was parked on the Compton Abbas runway.

The pair played with the controls for a while before the young man managed to start the engine at full throttle — causing the plane to leap forward 30ft. He and the girl quickly exited the plane, tried unsuccesfully to push it back to its original position and ran off laughing. And who was the irresponsible joker? Why "Bear" Grylls, of course.

HACKWATCH

IN EXCESS

● "POLICE in Sydney discounted speculation that Hutchence, who was in Australia to prepare for his band's 20th anniversary tour, had died accidentally during a sex game. They are convinced he took his own life." — *Daily Mail*, 24 November.

"Speculation grew last night that rock star Michael Hutchence was involved in a bizarre sex practice at the time of his death. Police sources indicated to a newspaper that there was evidence of 'sexual activity' in his room at Sydney's Ritz-Carlton Hotel." — *Daily Mail*, 26 November.

● "Despite the sad and sordid ending, Michael Hutchence and Paula Yates seem, however briefly, to have had happiness in their grasp." — Allison Pearson, London *Evening Standard*.

"Friends in Britain and Australia spoke of Hutchence's growing depression... 'For the past six weeks Paula's been saying that Michael's on the edge,' said one friend." — *Daily Mail*.

● "How much pain do we want Paula Yates to be in?... No allowance has been made for the fact that this is a human being in terrible distress... The one thing she needs right now may be privacy." — Suzanne Moore, *Independent*.

"Paula was always very good at fantasy... Like Diana, her flaws were obvious for all to see... She committed adultery... From professional flirt on *The Tube* to drooling interviews on the *Big Breakfast* bed, her brand of femininity — attention-seeking, coquettish, spoilt, little-girlie — has been as irritating to some women as it has been attractive to some men... Desperately juggling all her roles — mother, lover, career woman, little girl, harlot..." — Suzanne Moore of the *Independent*, doing her bit to ease Paula's distress and respect her privacy.

● "Michael Hutchence's cathedral funeral was a circus rather than a solemn farewell... Chief mourner Paula Yates let her grief hang out in a distastefully low-cut dress. (Even the *Daily Star* believes there is a time and a place) Is no one of note allowed to die with dignity any more?" — Editorial in *Daily Star*.

"Hutchence was a depressive who regularly overdosed on drugs and booze... Now we know he had a red-hot sex session just hours before his body was found. It looks more and more as if kinky sex was involved in his death." — *Star* columnist Peter Hill, allowing Hutchence to die with dignity.

● "She yearned to wear white for her marriage to Michael because he was her true, deep love. He was gentle." — Lynda Lee-Potter, *Daily Mail*.

"Close friend Steve Strange told how the 37-year-old rock star liked to tie up Paula and spank her during marathon sex sessions." — *Sunday People*.

● "His death comes as a dreadful shock to everyone who knows him. Nobody could have predicted that this man, a besotted father and caring lover... would want to cop out in such a style." — Simon Mills (editor of *GQ Active*), *Daily Mail*.

"Of course, fatherhood hadn't stopped Michael from behaving like the insatiable high-rolling itinerant that he always had been... Michael's attitude was that taking drugs and pursuing hedonism with wild abandon was part of the job. He made no secret of the fact that he had tried virtually every drug going." — Simon Mills, *Daily Mail*.

● "We first met in Monte Carlo... We met again just before he started seeing Paula. At the bar of Browns nightclub, he bought me a beer and we spent an hour talking... On the day of the birth, I called them to offer my congratulations. Michael answered and his joy was obvious." — Andy Coulson, *Sun* showbiz editor, proving that he was the only tabloid hack who really knew Hutchence.

"Tragic Michael Hutchence made an astonishing phone call to the *Mirror* in the middle of Paula Yates's bitter divorce from Bob Geldof. For 40 minutes the softly-spoken Aussie poured out his heart... Michael helped with his baby's delivery and again called the *Mirror* — this time to talk of his incredible joy at becoming a father." — Matthew Wright, the *Mirror*.

● "Maybe this is not the time to criticise Ms Yates too harshly. She has been tragically bereaved, and in the most bizarre circumstances." — Mary Kenny, *Daily Express*.

"But she does invite comment..." — Mary Kenny, *Daily Express*, going on to denounce Yates's dress sense.

● "Tragedy has struck Paula a desperate blow. It is always traumatic to lose someone you love, especially when they are young." — *Sun* agony aunt Deidre Sanders offers her expert assessment.

● "Dear Paula... How do you tell Tigerlily, you sobbed hysterically, that her dad killed himself? Honey, you just do. Because it's the truth. You've never been able to sort out fact from fantasy, but this is the turning point... Because although right now it seems that where you are is the loneliest place on the planet, you're not alone. There are four wee souls alongside you, hurting too. And they're the important ones." — An open letter to Paula Yates from *Daily Star* columnist Ingrid Millar.

● "Michael was a big, beautiful man, with a big, beautiful heart. The world is a smaller, grimmer place without him." — Miranda Sawyer, *Observer*.

CHARITY

ACTRESS Susan George was one of 60 celebrity guests at the glamorous Grosvenor House Hotel bash to raise money for the Foundation for Children with Leukaemia.

Other guests included that well-known philanthropist, Spurs boss Alan Sugar, and dapper Jeremy Beadle who made the prize draw for the evening's raffle.

All those whose tickets were drawn from the hat were called on to the dance floor where they were invited to pick a silver envelope containing details of their prize. Top prize was a Rover 100. The thrilled guest who opened the envelope to find the car was hers was, er, Susan George. She, charitably, kept the car.

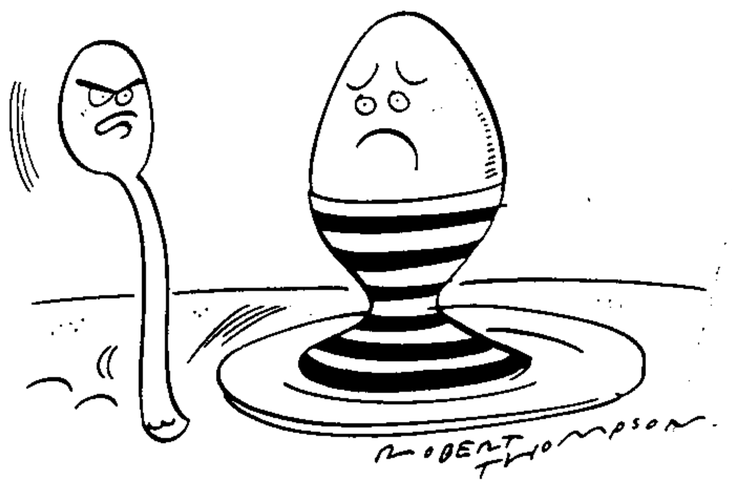
COOKERY NEWS

CHEF Albert Roux caused a stir and some headlines when he told dinner party hosts to cheat by serving up pre-cooked food.

The doyen of French haute cuisine, who charged lavishly for his skills at London's Le Gavroche, said guests would never tell the difference between a freshly made meal and a mass-produced, pre-packaged one.

He was quick to recommend Marks & Spencer's range to cookery students in Norwich, according to a full page spread in the *Express*. "Buy Marks & Spencer daube of beef and when your husband comes home, say 'Darling I've cooked something very special for you'," Roux suggested.

M&S chiefs must have been delighted by his well-publicised comments but they will not have been surprised. After all, they have been paying him as a consultant for four years. No wonder Mr Roux was pictured beaming with a packet of his favourite M&S dish in his hand. His fee will buy him a lifetime's supply — and he need never cook again!



"You're gonna get your head smashed in"

IN THE TEAROOM

THERE have been so many government pratfalls in recent weeks you would be forgiven for thinking that Peter Mandelson, the minister without portfolio, was away on a freebie.

In fact, spurned for a seat on Labour's national executive committee (NEC), Mandy's been sulking in the virtual pleasure dome he's been busy constructing inside his head... and that's given colleagues a taste of what pisspoor presentation does to the ratings. But things are set to change. The rapid rebuttal unit has been recast as the *attack* and rebuttal unit, and the Tories will soon regret having had the temerity to suggest that Tony Blair had been bought by the Formula One bosses or that paymaster general, Geoffrey Robinson, is a tax-dodger.

Shadow health spokesman John Maples' albeit qualified use of the word "corruption" has so offended primly puritan "new" Labour sensitivities that nothing short of a fresh chapter of Tory sleaze will expunge the stain. Thus, a pack of ambitious young researchers have been checking into each and every new directorship or business interest acquired by Conservative MPs since 1 May and retrawling the financial pasts of some of William Hague's closer cronies.

No joy so far though in finding anything discreditable on target-number-one, John Redwood, who's been leading the slur campaign against government grandees. But then he's the fellow who once said that "a man who could betray his wife could betray his country" — a statement indicative of a degree of ironclad moral self-confidence that is rare in Tory circles these days. It seems the noses of Labour's truffle-hunters are now turning to the perennially interesting question of the source of Alan Duncan's fortune. No strenuous digging needed there... see *Eyes passim*.

'Urquhart'

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We don't sign wound wobins."

— The very grand Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, on being asked to support the pro-hunting lobby

WHILE most Labour MPs from coalfield areas have been ganging up on energy minister John Battle, who seems to be presiding over the death throes of coal mining, one of Battle's neighbouring Yorkshire MPs is keeping his head down.

In the solid mining area of Hemsworth, constituents are asking exactly what their MP Jon Trickett is doing to protect thousands of miners' jobs. This is a good question as Trickett is parliamentary private secretary to none other than Peter Mandelson. It was Mandy, in the Commons specifically for the recent coal debate, who was sitting next to Battle whispering into his ear.

The King of Spin would certainly be proud of the recently leaked DTI press office document offering secret advice to the government on how to deflect blame for pit closures. The "restricted" document advises ministers: "Presenting government non-intervention is difficult since coal played such a central part in the economy for many years and has an emotional appeal to the press... To counter this we need to be able to spell out why direct government action is not feasible, as once might have been possible... We could approach individual journalists for one-to-one briefings, including leader writers to seek to influence their comments if they intend to write on the subject. Given a crunch statement from Mr Budge, leader writers would be hard pushed not to contrast the rump that will remain with the once crucial industry — but hopefully would listen to the arguments and the pain for us would be shortlived."

THE magic of gas, part one: "PowerGen's impressive new power station is a massive tribute to the continued success of the power industry in Britain and to the thousands of people who have worked on it.

"The station will provide enough electricity to meet the needs of half the homes and factories in Wales... I congratulate everyone who has worked so hard to bring it to fruition."

Thus spoke Margaret Beckett, president of the board of trade, on 4 July when she travelled to north Wales to open the gas-fired power station at Connah's Quay (see HP Sauce, 25 July).

The magic of gas, part two: Five months later, on 3 December, prime minister Tony Blair announced a moratorium on new gas-fired power stations because energy policy was too important to be left to market forces.

Since the general election, the new government has sanctioned five new gas-fired power stations. In addition, one of Beckett's first actions on coming to power was to give permission for the construction of an additional 90 megawatts of generating capacity at a new station at Sutton Bridge in Lincolnshire (see HP Sauce, 8 August).

The government has explained that it can't help the coal industry because that would mean intervening in a privately-owned company. PowerGen, which received the kiss of approval from Ms Beckett, is, er, a privately owned company.

SOCIAL security minister Harriet Harman's plan to cut benefit to lone parents may have sparked a rebellion among Labour MPs, but she has been able to count on support from one quarter at least.

While the whips were urging the rebels to sign a "private letter" of protest to chancellor Gordon Brown (which was immediately leaked) rather than support an early-day motion (EDM), Leicester East MP Patricia Hewitt went on the BBC's *Newsnight* to denounce the malocontents for "all being members of the Campaign Group... which has opposed successive Labour leaders from Neil Kinnock onwards".

Since both the EDM and the private letter were supported by MPs from across the party — including the formidable Gwyneth Dunwoody, who is no mere agit prop leftie — Hewitt was immediately left with egg on her face, however.

Still, she was bound to come to the aid of Harman, having worked with her at the National Council for Civil Liberties. Old lags also wondered if the Patricia Hewitt who denounced the leftwingers on *Newsnight* was the same dungareed and ranting Patricia Hewitt who once launched a vitriolic attack on James Callaghan at a Labour conference after he lost the 1979 election. Er, and it was.

EX-SINGLE mum turned single-mum-basher Caroline Flint, Labour MP for the Don Valley, is rapidly earning her spurs as a "Tone clone".

Eager to please the beleaguered benefit cutter Harriet Harman in the debate on lone parents, Flint even claimed the policy as "my policy" and went on to declare that "I am here to represent back-benchers today — I might like to represent the frontbench in the near future".

Perhaps she knows something Harman doesn't.

BEFORE Patricia Hewitt was selected to replace veteran MP Greville Janner in Leicester, she was director of research at Andersen Consulting which, as the *Eye* has chronicled, began a torrid courtship of "new" Labour before the election.

The company lent some of its brightest stars to the party. These included Liam Byrne, who had previously coached Labour leaders in the art of government at the Cranfield School of Management. He also wrote a series of vacuous management-speak articles for the Young Fabians' mag, so it was no surprise that soon afterwards he tipped up at the society joining old Andersen Consulting colleagues Ian Corfield and Mike Yates.

He has recently written another vacuous pamphlet on "reorganising the civil service" (ie stuffing it full of Blair supporters).

THE first report of the Labour-dominated Commons select committee on health has deliberated on tobacco advertising and the proposed European Union directive which seeks to ban it — and it doesn't make pleasant reading for public health minister Tessa Jowell.

The committee remains concerned at the "government's proposals to seek an EC Directive which contains provision for a permanent exemption of Formula One". It continues by saying: "We believe that Formula One should be placed under the same pressure as other sports to seek alternative sponsorship".

What would the committee have to say if its members discovered, for example, that before the general election Labour had told tobacco manufacturers it would drop plans to restrict sponsorship — provided the merchants of death withheld the usual free advertising hoardings handed over to the Tories?

NEW Sittingbourne MP Derek Wyatt, who has got himself on the Commons select committee investigating the millennium dome, is certainly experienced in handling extravagant millennium fiascos.

Previously a Haringey councillor, Wyatt chaired the council's Alexandra Palace board which wasted £100,000 on a ludicrous bid for the Victorian pile to become a digital theme park. While the Ally Pally charity faced £60m of debt, Wyatt and his chums indulged in weekends in Paris watching horse-trotting competitions and even a trip to the Tory party conference — all from charity funds.

The bid failed at the first fence and Haringey ratepayers are currently applying to the district auditor to surcharge Wyatt and three other senior councillors and officers.

When the local history society applied for Ally Pally to be listed, Wyatt spent £7,000 engaging architect Max Hutchinson to get the listing blocked. His report, dismissing the palace's historic value (birthplace of television, etc) convinced both English Heritage and the heritage department that the palace *should* be listed straight away.

Wyatt escaped the shambles when he took up his seat in Westminster, leaving the people of Haringey to pick up the bills. The "People's Palace" currently faces sale to developers. What hope for Peter Mandelson's dome?

GOVERNMENT critics of the new lottery game Interlotto need look no further than Westminster to find the culprit.

Its chairman for the last two years has been Lord Mancroft, a Conservative hereditary peer. The government criticises the game on the ground that its presence in pubs will encourage the twin evils of gambling and drinking — and of course it will rival the fund- and tax-raising national lottery.

But the government need not worry: Lord Mancroft is also chairman of the Addiction Recovery Foundation charity.

LABOUR has answered charges that is interested only in the successful: it has appointed Lord Alexander of Weedon to the commission considering proportional representation.

Who he? Chairman of the National Westminster Bank who has steered it to a trading loss of £600m this year.

LABOUR spin doctors were so keen to dampen the Bernie Ecclestone-Formula One funding row that when they heard Diane Abbott was going to raise the issue again at a national executive committee meeting they went into overdrive.

"Blair roasts Abbott at NEC" was standard reporting in the London *Evening Standard* and other rags. But those who attended the meeting have no recollection of Abbott receiving a dressing down, let alone a roasting.

The spin-doctors will also have congratulated themselves on how well they handled the £1m cash donation from hamburger man Robert Earl. They were particularly thrilled that spivvy PR merchant Matthew Freud managed to persuade most of Fleet Street that the Planet Hollywood tycoon had made his donation with no expectations of any favours from Tony Blair.

That may be; but the donation did not come altogether as a surprise to Labour. The burger czar didn't put his hand in his pocket unbidden: it was the party who solicited his donation.

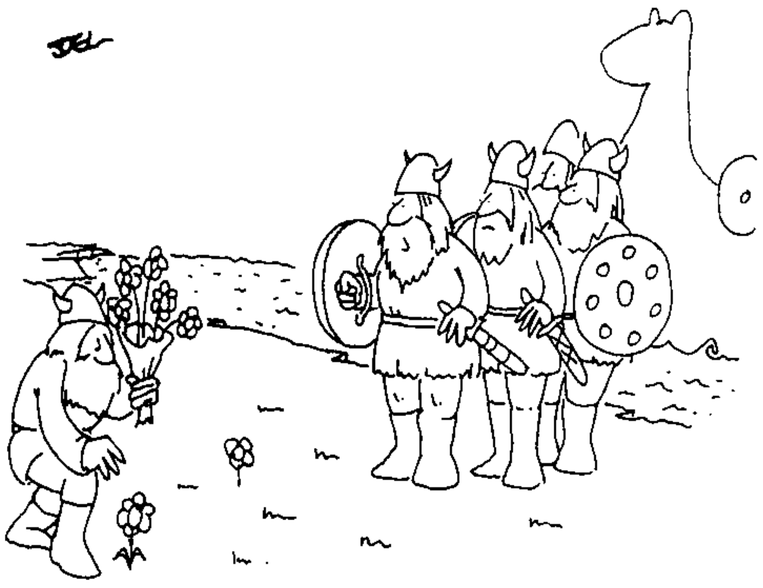
Cue brass band music, and fade.

THE Ministry of Sound was quick off the mark with its plan to turn the royal yacht Britannia into a "floating rave venue".

The MoS heads a consortium which wants to ignore Princess Anne (she wants the royal yacht scrapped) and spend £30m turning it into an "entertainment complex". As MoS spokesman Mark Rodol told the *Sun:* "People would rather dance on her than see her scrapped." Britannia, that is: not Princess Anne.

Presumably one of the key people who can persuade the Windsors — and President Tony Blair — that this is a jolly good idea is the fleet of foot Peter Mandelson, a personal friend of MoS owner James Palumbo.

Before the general election, Palumbo provided Mandy with a chauffeur driven car. But despite this and their friendship there's no question of any conflict of interest, and the Travolta-esque minister would never provide inside info or inappropriate help for his disco-owning chum.



"Eric's gone 'off-message' "

A POPULAR party game at Westminster this Christmas is trying to guess the identity of the young "likeable left-of-centre" MP whose "terrible obsessions" involving a briefcase full of soiled knickers are described in the chapter dealing with London brothels in Nick Davies's new book about "hidden Britain", *Dark Heart.*

"The girls used to see him on television [*in the House of Commons*] with the same briefcase by his side," Davies writes, "and shake their heads in wonder at what must be in there."

MORE trouble for former Scottish secretary Michael Forsyth, who lost his Stirling seat for the Conservatives at the last election.

His local party is now being sued by a former constituent, Terry McKeown, who was hit on the head by a poster of Forsyth which broke loose from its moorings on a metal flag pole and hit him on the head while he was standing outside a polling station.

Mr McKeown is suing for £55,000, the Tories have admitted liability in court and the case has been adjourned. Worse still for Forsyth, after McKeown left hospital he went to the polling booth and voted Labour... "out of spite".

'Backbiter'

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE former Catholic Apostolic Church in Mansfield Place in Edinburgh, which contains extraordinary murals of the 1890s by Phoebe Anna Traquair, that remarkable artist who was the subject of a major Edinburgh Festival exhibition in 1995, is in a sorry state.

The church is now redundant, but new uses are proposed and potential tenants ready. Edinburgh city council and the Mansfield Traquair Trust are working to secure its future and lottery money is available. But nothing happens and the building continues to decay — all thanks to its owner, something euphemistically called the Edinburgh Brick Company.

The church is interesting in its own right. It was designed in 1872 by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, the important Edinburgh architect who was also responsible for the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Traquair's murals were carried out in 1893-97. One of several artists inspired to execute murals by the great Patrick Geddes, her decorative scheme is intense, mystical, symbolist. A leading figure in the Edinburgh Arts and Crafts movement and a modern feminist icon, Phoebe Traquair — born in Dublin — had already worked in the Song School of St Mary's Cathedral and became the first honorary woman member of the Royal Scottish Academy.

Alas, when it was realised the Day of Judgement and the millennium were indefinitely delayed, the Catholic Apostolics of Edinburgh faded away and in 1958 the church passed to the Reformed Baptists who clearly did not like it and did their best to spoil it. Then they moved on. In 1989 the empty building was bought for £155,000 by the Edinburgh Brick Company, which proposed to convert it into offices. A scheme for inserting floors received planning permission in 1990 but, mercifully, nothing was done. When this consent lapsed in 1995, the company applied for renewal. But owing to the change in public perception about the importance of Phoebe Traquair, this was refused. The company did not appeal.

Meanwhile, in 1992, the Friends of Mansfield Place Church had been founded, following the rejection of a scheme to convert the church into a night club. The Mansfield Traquair Trust, dedicated to conserving the murals, was launched in 1993. In that year, Edinburgh council repaired the listed building to prevent water damaging the murals: for this, a "charge" was laid on the building. Then in 1995 Historic Scotland's Stenhouse conservators carried out stabilising work on the murals. The trust, backed by the city, carried out a feasibility study and established that the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations was willing to use the church — and did not require mutilating it with extra floors. In 1996 the heritage lottery fund offered a 75 percent grant, of £2.8m.

All that was now needed was for the trust to buy or lease the church. In 1996 Mr Nigel Gibbons, a director of the Edinburgh Brick Company, verbally accepted an offer of £200,000. The price then jumped to £265,000 when a formal offer was made. Becoming exasperated, the city council served a repairs notice and, as no work was carried out, applied for a compulsory purchase order. This was ratified last October. The Mansfield Traquair Trust then offered £250,000 for the building, but Charles Gibbons, another director, now thinks it is worth £6-700,000. The district valuer disagrees, finding it worth no more than £80,000.

The Edinburgh Brick Company has now issued a writ against the council seeking to prohibit the CPO. This legal process could last two or three years, during which the building will deteriorate further — water is still coming through the west gable. Charles Gibbons has stated that "the Edinburgh Brick Company would like to come to some agreement over the property"; but if so it certainly goes about it in a funny way. In fact, the company doesn't seem to have much to do with brick — fortunately, perhaps, as the Athens of the North is a city of stone — and seems merely to be an asset on paper for the Gibbons family. Nice for them. Pity, though, about one of the city's most unusual historic buildings and its wonderful murals by a great artist.

IS THERE no end to the mania for converting every building in the land into a pub? Now Oldham council wants to cash in by selling its old Town Hall for conversion into a pub or junk food emporium.

The building was a town hall until 1978 and a crown court until 1992. The handsome Greek Ionic facade of 1841 will survive, but the council chamber, the court room and the Egyptian treasurer's office will all go. Does it matter?

Councillor John Battye, Labour leader of Oldham council, assures us it is "a very ordinary Lancashire town hall". Well, never mind that it is not ordinary but rather beautiful, before governments — both Conservative and Labour — wrecked local government in Britain and ensured its domination by mediocrities, such a thing might have been seen as an asset as well as a tangible symbol of the history of a once proud and independent Lancashire town.

'Piloti'

(NEARLY) NEW GIRL:

Jacqui Lait

WHEN even the diehard Tories of Beckenham could no longer support the bedroom romps of their teenager-bonking MP Piers Merchant, they turned to the capable figure of Jacqui Lait.

Jacqui, 49, freshly turfed out of Hastings and Rye in May, could not have dreamt of a seat so soon, especially after her disastrous election performance: her constituency showed one of the largest swings away from the Tories in the country.

After her recent victory, the press foolishly dubbed Beckenham's (nearly) new girl as a "motherly type" who would back William Hague's line on Europe. But Hastings and Rye constituents remember their former MP rather differently.

Local fishermen in particular failed to encounter Lait's maternal instinct. They were so infuriated by her lack of support for their cause in parliament that they hung an effigy of her off the quayside for her last two years in office.

Fathers who were being unfairly treated by the Child Support Agency also encountered Jacqui's warm side when they visited her and Bexhill and Battle MP Charles Wardle. Wardle agreed there were some inconsistencies which he would put to the minister. Lait refused to listen and told the fathers to go away and pay up.

When pollsters surveyed her old constituency last January and asked: "Do you approve or disapprove of your local MP?", not only did those polled give Lait the thumbs down, but it was privately reported that most laughed out loud at the question.

Lait's Hastings and Rye opponents gleefully leapt on this lack of popularity. The usual political rule is not to mention your opponent in your own propaganda. But Jacqui's adversaries mentioned her name repeatedly, believing that reminding the electorate of her name would remind them to vote against her.

Scottish-born, Jacqui went into public relations after leaving Strathclyde University, eventually setting up on her own as a parliamentary consultant before she won her southern seat. Far from following the Hague-European line, however, Jacqui is passionately pro-Europe. Two days after her reelection, the Congress of the European Movement met at the LSE. There, Conservative activists who are determined to reverse Hague's line on the EMU celebrated Jacqui's victory. Edwina Curry made the keynote speech and described the by-election result as a triumph for the European cause.

While they remember her pro-European fervour, those who knew her in Hastings also remember her voracious appetite for high office. If gunning for Europe means a fall-out with her leadership, Jacqui will keep her matronly head below the parapet.

EYE TV

Pommies (Channel 4)
Hotel (BBC1)
Travel Reps (BBC1)
Breaking Point (BBC2)

IT's a good thing Radio 4's *Today* programme has abandoned its personality of the year poll because of worries about vote-rigging in previous years. Until recently, it had seemed inevitable that Diana, Princess of Wales would, er, walk it. But real fears had begun to surface that the winner might be Maureen from Wales or Elaine from Liverpool.

Never heard of them? You probably have. They were the television stars of 1997. Maureen was the central figure in *Driving School*, a documentary series about an L-test centre seen earlier this year on BBC1. Elaine is at the centre of *Hotel*, a docco about Liverpool's Britannia Adelphi currently running on the same channel.

This has been the year of RPT (Real People Television). Apart from Maureen and her three-point turns and Elaine and her dining room rosters, viewers are currently able to watch package holiday tour guides agonising over difficult customers and pregnancy scares in Menorca in the BBC series *Travel Reps*; couples undergoing marriage counselling in the BBC2 series *Breaking Point*; and ex-pats describing their lives in Australia in the Channel 4 series *Pommies*.

So why is there suddenly so much RPTV? The answer is that the genre appeals simultaneously to different prejudices in the creative wing and the financial wing of broadcasting. The programme boys are obsessed with what they call "democratisation": filling the airwaves with ordinary people rather than broadcasting professionals.

So radio is dominated by phone-ins and TV simply installs camera-crews in assorted workplaces. The money men love RPTV because it's cheap. Your Maureens and Elaines are so pleased to be on screen they scarcely demand fees. In the year of the People's Princess and the People's Palace, it's not surprising that we've ended up with the People's Programmes.

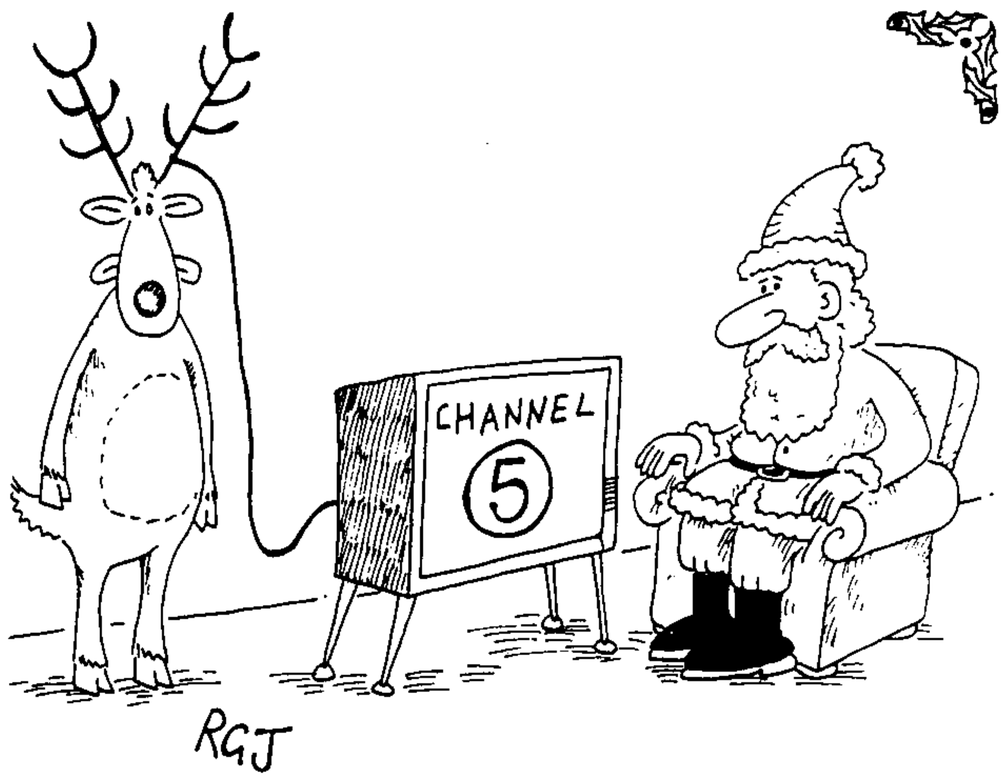
We have seen the future and it hurts. For a start there's the problem of the BBC participating in such blatant advertising. Since transmission began, the Adelphi has achieved the remarkable feat for a hotel in Liverpool of becoming a tourist destination in itself. An ecstatic management is begging the BBC to make a second series. The package company featured in *Holiday Reps* can also expect a similar lift in business, and nor is Maureen's driving instructor going to have to worry much about the cost of replacing burned-out clutches.

Most worrying is the way in which a classic genre of television has been debased. These series pretend to be "fly-on-the-wall" documentaries. But that form of film-making depended — in the hands of directors like Paul Watson, Roger Graef and Molly Dineen — on months or even years of filming, staying with the subjects until they had become so used to the cameras that they behaved in a natural way. The highlights of these series were unguarded moments when a character behaved as they would have done when not being filmed.

But — with such films as *Driving School*, *Hotel*, *Travel Reps* and *Pommies* — the shooting schedule is short and the subjects are usually interviewed rather than observed in their habitat. Essentially, non-celebs are simply treated in the way that the famous would be. An interview is arranged with them. This is easier (and, once again, cheaper) than conventional fly-on-the-wall. What it means is that this form of television has made a significant and depressing shift from observational to biographical.

In tellyland, the length of a series is described by an infant school sum in which number of episodes is multiplied by minutes in each: 6 x 60, 3 x 45 and so on. In that sense, Andy Warhol got it all right except the figures. With television on its prole roll, it's safe to predict that eventually everyone will have their 8 x 30 of fame.

'Square Eyes'



MEDIA NEWS

MORE red faces at the BBC's 24-hour TV news operation, where bosses have struggled to explain why coverage of the death of Michael Hutchence was so underwhelming.

Despite huge investment in digital picture technology, highly trained hacks and "quality reporting from around the globe", the *Now O'Clock News* could only offer a still photo of Sydney harbour bridge and some phoned-over speculation about somebody called Mark Hutchins.

Viewers confused by News 24's report of "a rumour" about the rocker's death — "one I won't go into", said the commentator — were forced to turn to ITV's Teletext where "death by hanging" was confirmed from the start.

Oddly enough, when BBC staff approach the offices of the pisspoor new service at TV Centre they are greeted by posters of the station's hacks working diligently — many of them watching banks of TV screens. On close inspection it seems they are all watching the same programme: not the channel's own exciting news and sport output, however, but *Men Behaving Badly*.

SURPRISED Sky employees have received an email about the decision of cable operator Telewest to drop the History Channel from its line-up to make room for other delights (including the new BBC channels).

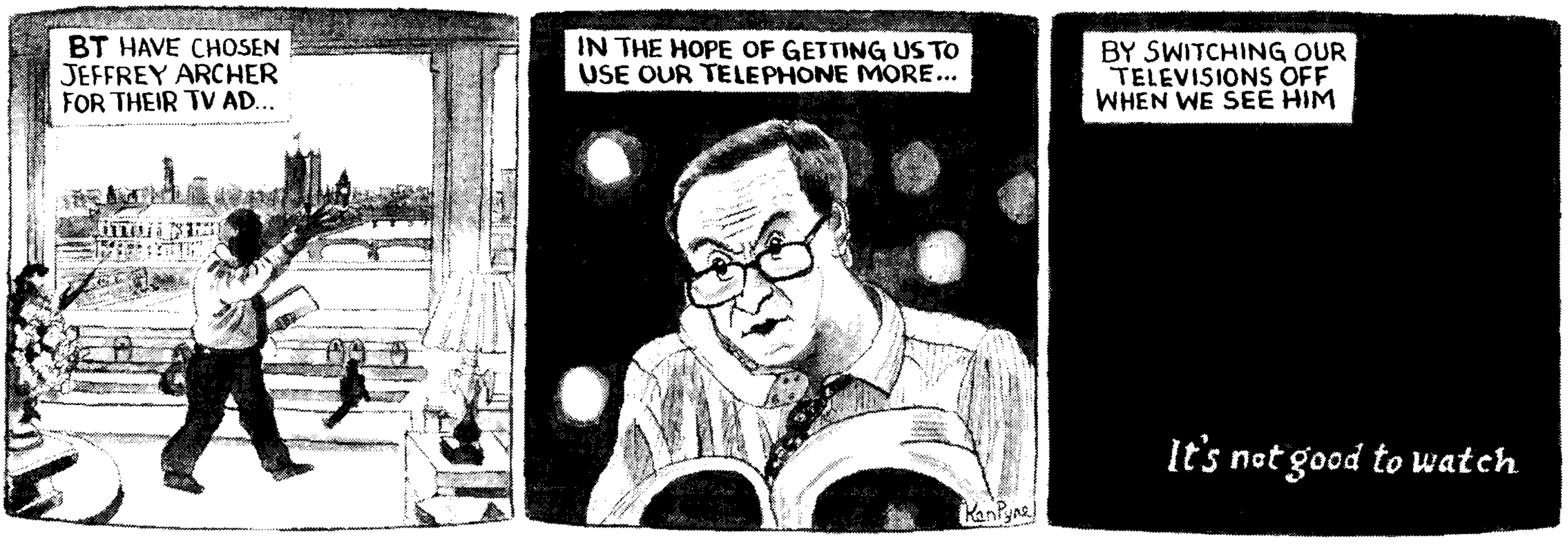
"It is important that all Sky staff who subscribe to Telewest call their local Telewest operator and demand that the History Channel be retained on their service," writes Sky executive Alan Scott. "Please also encourage any friends/family whom you know to be Telewest customers to do the same." Scott helpfully lists all Telewest's phone numbers.

The phone-in must look like a spontaneous gesture by irate viewers, of course, rather than a stunt organised by Sky. So to avoid any leaks Scott concludes by ordering all staff to delete the email after they have noted down the telephone numbers.

L!VE TV continues to reach new lows in programme quality and treatment of its staff.

While the cable station's London studios are busy with *Lunchbox Volleyball*, *Handy Hunks* and *Topless Darts*, the Liverpool bureau is supposed to produce regular news updates and local programmes for the region's viewers. One problem: there are so few staff it is almost impossible to produce output if someone is off sick.

So, just in time for Christmas, a memo was sent to staff noting that this is "the season for sickness", but that a new policy means that "as of Monday 7th December [*sic*], salaries will be docked for any days taken off sick. Only bona fide holidays will not be subject to the docking of salaries".


BT HAVE CHOSEN JEFFREY ARCHER FOR THEIR TV AD...
IN THE HOPE OF GETTING US TO USE OUR TELEPHONE MORE...
BY SWITCHING OUR TELEVISIONS OFF WHEN WE SEE HIM
It's not good to watch
Ken Pyne

NEW commissioning editors at James Boyle's Radio 4 are so terrified of filling slots with programmes that don't fit the requirements of Birtian market research techniques that almost half the station's schedule is still blank after next April.

Experienced programme-makers who have been through the commissioning process are now learning that the dozens — in some cases hundreds — of ideas put in by their departments have been rejected without discussion by nervous commissioners, in some cases even because forms were incorrectly filled in. Now they're being asked to develop more to fill the gaps.

Boyle knows his listeners are almost bound to react badly to change. The idea of the new schedule is to give them as little as possible to complain about — hence the rejection of anything too risky or imaginative. Expect programmes about hobbies, interesting bits of architecture and hours of relatively low-cost archive-trawling.

Boyle also knows that if he's got any chance of meeting the cost savings required to pay for the launch of News 24, he'll also have to lose staff. Happily the new commissioning process will mean that he can blame redundancies on those programme-makers who could not come up with the goods, rather than on the corporation for squandering too much money of Birt's pet project.

OPERA NEWS

IF culture secretary Chris Smith really wants to know how the Royal Opera House lost so many millions and was so badly mismanaged, he could always ask his colleague in government Baroness Blackstone.

Tessa Blackstone was on the ROH board for 10 years — the very period covered by the damning report of Gerald Kaufman's culture select committee.

The failure of the board was so absolute that Kaufman's committee recommended its resignation en masse. Luckily the baroness was spared the embarrassment: she had already given up her ROH job to take up her post as junior education minister.

Still, she has managed to carry forward her experience of the ROH (characterised as "incompetence" and "disastrous misjudgment") into government. One of her first ministerial acts was to try to "tough out" the possibility of students who had deferred their university places for a year taking them up immediately to avoid "new" Labour's university fees.

Any talk of tens of thousand of students cramming into university a year early was "scaremongering", she declared. Almost immediately thousands of students did try to abandon their year out and the minister was forced into an unseemly U-turn.

LUVVIES

Someone once said 'Comedy is tragedy plus time' and there's a lot to be said for that. I mean, Alan Partridge is truly tragic. And with Ted and Ralph, I honestly cried watching bits from the new series…

ARABELLA WEIR
New Musical Express

Submitted by Ben Clark.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

ON Sunday nights Channel 4 is broadcasting a series of documentaries attacking the green movement, under the title *Against Nature*.

There have already been grumbles from some pro-green participants who were somehow under the impression that the series was to be a dispassionate history of the ecology movement. But the strangest thing about the programme is the production company RDF — whose other products include such deeply serious films as *Strippergran*, *London Lap Dancing for Ladies*, *Housewives Striptease*, *London Lingerie*, *Horse of the Rear Show* and, er, *Superdick*.

PISTE OFF

IN SPITE of tweaking its circulation figures and the results of its ski tests, the *Daily Mail Ski Magazine* remains in the forefront of crusading consumer journalism.

The December issue includes a detailed review of the best mail-order services and catalogues, in which experts give their learned opinions. The author of the piece, Rhonda Cox, lavishes special praise on the 235-page catalogue produced by ski retailer Snow and Rock. Can she by any chance be related to the Rhonda Cox who is credited as one of the team who put the Snow and Rock catalogue together? Fittingly enough, the catalogue informs us that Rhonda's field is "creative writing".

Another member of the *Daily Mail Ski Magazine*'s staff to have an intimate knowledge of the products offered by Snow and Rock is fashion editor Holly Dobbs. In addition to her duties at the *Daily Mail*, Holly formed part of the production team for the catalogue.

Daily Mail Ski Magazine's editor-in-chief is Sir David English, a member of the Press Complaints Commission and chairman of its code of practice committee. Both bodies are charged with maintaining high standards of press ethics. It would therefore be absurd to link Snow and Rock's high profile in the *Mail* magazine to Holly Dobbs's association with the shop — or to the large number of photographs taken for Snow and Rock by one Mark Junak, who just happens to be Holly's husband.

THE BIG FIGHT

VIEWERS who paid ridiculous sums to watch boxer Chris Eubank's World Tour on Sky TV will be fascinated by evidence that has emerged in Dublin's high court where Barry Hearn, who promoted Eubank's Sky fights and acted as his manager, is suing boxer Steve Collins for alleged breach of contract.

As it happens, Hearn was also Collins's manager. So when the Sky cameras turned up in Cork a couple of years ago Hearn was promoter of the fight and manager for both contestants.

In the witness box the match referee, a very flamboyant Mr Ron Lipton from New York, claimed that Hearn had twice approached him before the contest to warn that Collins was a dirty fighter. At that stage, the referee said, he didn't know that Hearn was actually Collins's manger as well as Eubank's.

Hearn denied in evidence that the conversations ever took place: "I didn't speak to him at all on anything specific in any way that could possibly be connected with this," he said.

Collins's barrister Colm Allen also alleged that the "sordid and seamy" Hearn had used the services of the enticingly named Mr Nobbie Knobbs, who specialised in supplying opponents who were guaranteed to be beaten. "Mr Hearn," said Allen, "as a matter of habit, when he needed a loser to mislead and cheat television viewers, would give good old Nobbie a ring and ask him to produce any of his fighters, because if Mr Hearn is to be believed, they were all losers. There wasn't one of them who could deck a cat, certainly not from a vertical position."

To the legal profession's joy, the entertaining hearing lasted an astonishing and vastly expensive six weeks instead of the four or five days predicted. Judge Philip O'Sullivan will give judgment in January. Should it go against Hearn, Sky will presumably be anxious to refund the money paid by subscribers to watch the Eubank fights.

IT WAS a bad day for Glen del Medico, the BBC's cautious libel lawyer, when the BBC apologised in open court on 8 December to Peter Laister, formerly Robert Maxwell's vice chairman.

In its notorious programme whitewashing Kevin Maxwell after his acquittal on fraud charges over the Maxwell pension funds, the BBC wrongly accused Laister of tippexing out his own signature. The tippexing was done by someone else, and Laister successfully sued, winning damages and an apology.

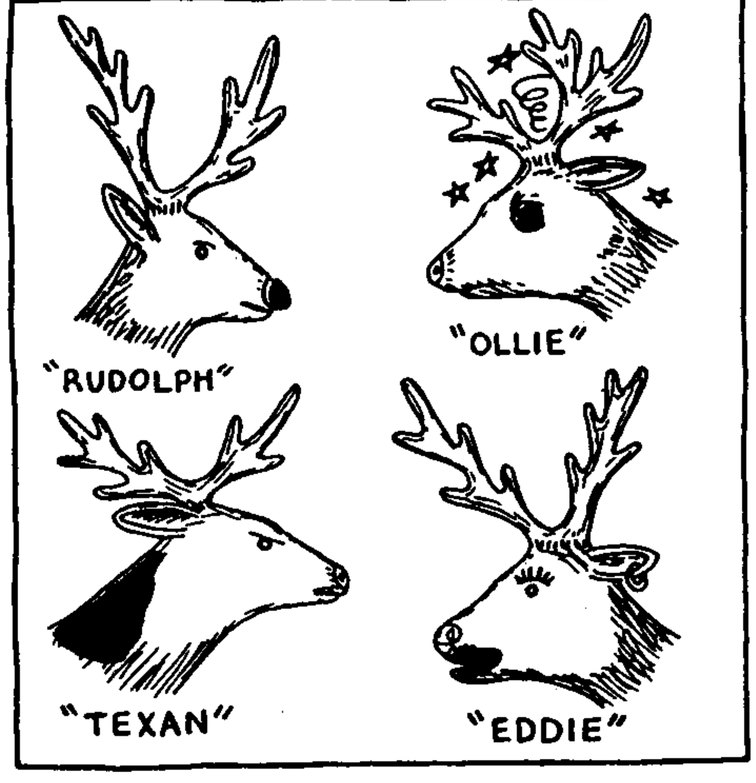
Ironically del Medico had also "legalled" the previous programme on the Maxwell trial, made by Tom Bower, and had painstakingly excised from it anything remotely damaging to Kevin Maxwell, including some forthright criticisms of the Maxwells from Peter Laister.

WHEN *Twin Town* director Kevin Allen went to the Aberystwyth Film Festival and was invited to the Welsh Arts Council party, he may have expected some small adulation for his film, optimistically hyped by some as "Wales's answer to *Trainspotting*".

Instead, a tired and emotional woman lurched at him across the reception and denounced his film as a "cynical concept" which was "detrimental to the image of Wales". The dumpy brother of badboy actor Keith Allen asked the woman if she'd seen the film. She had not.

Nothing more might have happened if Allen hadn't bumped into the woman later and asked her who she was. When she told him she was Angharad Jones, drama commissioning editor at the Welsh language channel S4C, Kevin launched into a tirade at her ignorance and then spat at her. Jones then burst into tears.

Later, her honour was defended by a knight in shining armour, one Dewi Williams, a script editor for S4C, who confronted Allen and punched him in the mouth leaving the Welsh Arts Council highly embarrassed and its star guest with a split lip. All rather, er, "detrimental to the image of Wales", surely?



DOING THE ROUNDS

Herpes and hype

IT's not been a great month for Glaxo Wellcome with the withdrawal of troglitazone, its new diabetes drug, due to liver damage. So thank heavens for the International Herpes Management Forum (IHMF), "an independent group of international physicians" (supported by Glaxo Wellcome) which was set up in 1993 "to improve awareness and management of herpes virus infections".

Glaxo Wellcome has a big stake in herpes with the antiviral drugs aciclovir (£18.95 for 25 200mg tablets) and valaciclovir (£23.50 for 10 500mg tablets). Its biggest rival is SmithKline Beecham, selling Famvir at £25.56 for 10 tablets.

The IHFM's "improved public awareness" campaign recently resurfaced as a three-page press release from its annual meeting in Cannes on 23-24 November called "Genital Herpes, the silent epidemic". The release headlined US figures that showed the incidence of herpes simplex infection rose by an "alarming" 32 percent between 1978-1990, while neglecting to mention that in England, new infections have fallen in 1995 and 1996 to 14,990.

These promising figures were clearly communicated to Mark Austin, a *Sunday Times* news journalist, by Marian Nicholson, director of the Herpes Viruses Association, and two genito-urinary consultants. Despite this Austin reported — in a piece headed "Herpes epidemic feared as new cases reach high" — that there were "27,000 cases of herpes last year... and almost 15,000 new cases". The 27,000 figure refers to clinic attendances, including repeat visits by the same person, and not separate cases. And there was no mention of the downward trend in new cases.

Whether this was sloppy journalism or bowing to Glaxo pressure is impossible to say. Dr Thomas Stuttaford, writing in the *Times* on 13 November (under the headline "Herpes cases on the increase"), manages to plug both of Glaxo's drugs but not SmithKline Beecham's.

Overall, media scares and hypes surrounding herpes have done far more psychological damage than the disease itself ever could. Headlines such as "Curse of the Promiscuous" and "60 percent of babies die" engender a strong sense of guilt and dirtiness among sufferers. When this is offloaded on to doctors, the tendency is to prescribe expensive antiviral drugs — which are often ineffective. One UK study on the psychological impact of herpes simplex infection found that doctors prescribed antiviral drugs because patients were stressed (80 percent) or depressed (70 percent).

The IHMF is quick to point out the downside of herpes. "It's a painful, chronic condition that can ruin relationships — and is a life-long infection." In fact many herpes infections are asymptomatic, only a small minority of infections are painful and chronic, and there are other illnesses that can give life-long infections (eg chicken pox and glandular fever) that don't have the same stigma attached. Herpes simplex is just a skin infection that can cause a rash anywhere it gains entry to the body (eg finger, lips, genitals).

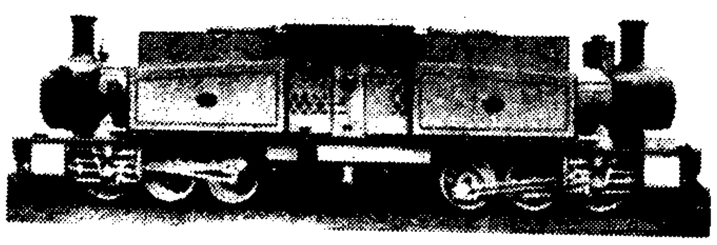
For those whose relationships are ruined by herpes, the cause is more likely to be misinformation rather than lack of drug treatment. The IHMF is keen to point out that genital herpes "can be successfully controlled with antiviral medicines but three out of four people diagnosed with genital herpes do not receive any treatment". Could this be that they don't need any?

Anti-viral drugs do not eradicate the herpes simplex virus but merely contain it. For first attacks there is benefit in the drugs within six days of onset of the rash because they reduce the time to healing, the duration of viral shedding and pain. However, for recurrent infections treatment has to be taken as soon as symptoms heralding a rash appear, and even then the benefits are marginal. Those with severe, recurrent herpes may be helped from longer term treatment, but this is only a small minority. The vast majority have fewer and milder attacks, but suffer disproportionate torment because the media makes them think they're part of a plague.

For them the herpes virus association helpline (0171-609 9061) is much more use than the pharmacy.

M.D.

"Apparently you can't go private, sir!"



SIGNAL FAILURES

ARE the Labour MPs John Prescott and Glenda Jackson, who used to object loudly to the Tories selling off publicly-owned railway assets, related to the two Labour MPs of the same names now presiding over the sale of yet more publicly-owned railway assets? Afraid so.

As highlighted in *Eye* 922 shortly before the general election, the Tories had instructed the British Rail Property Board (BRPB) to sell its redundant railway land quickly. Then its portfolio included 600 miles of derelict track-beds and numerous disused yards. After seven months of Labour government and numerous auctions, the portfolio is decidedly thinner.

At one London auction last month the Railway Development Society (RDS) recorded several plots of land being sold to private buyers — despite rail-freight operators and customers having declared that the land would be needed for rail-freight terminals within the next five years. Three acres at New Southgate, north London, went for £1.3m; four acres at Neasden, also north London, went for £2m; and 22 acres at Whittlesea, near Peterborough, were sold for £246,000.

A 64-acre plot at Chard Junction, Somerset, has been sold even though it still has rail sidings which give access to a large creamery. The same plot was also earmarked for a new station by a consortium of local authorities as part of a £14.4m rail upgrade.

Also up for grabs at the London auction were two sites which the RDS says would have been ideal for interchange terminals — ie where buses and trains would link up should John Prescott really be serious about his integrated transport policy. A parcel of land at London's Forest Hill station, beside a main road which is a focal point for local bus routes, was sold for £165,000, and another site adjacent to Hayes station, Kent, went for £50,000.

The option of buying back such land for public transport will be prohibitively expensive in most cases, and many sites are being bought with a view to slapping buildings on them. The RDS also says plans for a light-rail system in Bristol may be thwarted by the rapid sale, without consultation, of railway land there.

Replying to a parliamentary question on 25 November, Glenda Jackson seemed to suggest that Railtrack would get first refusal before land went to auction. But the RDS found Railtrack failing to secure many of the lots it bid for at the London auction — land presumably required for railway operations.

Pressure groups like the RDS are not the only ones who are worried. Freight company English, Welsh and Scottish Railways (EWSR), the local government association, the light-rail transit association and the association of train operating companies have all said the hasty disposal of assets could stymie rail's ability to take pressure off the road system. EWSR is particularly angry at not being consulted before rail land is put up for auction because it is aiming to triple the amount of rail-borne freight over 10 years.

Rail Property Ltd (as the BRPB is now known) is still state owned, so all that is needed to put the auctions on hold is an order from a minister. Prescott was asked in October to freeze all freehold sales by Rail Property, but the plea fell on deaf ears. Transport policy is supposedly under review at the moment but Labour's refusal even to make this simple change while future options are considered suggests little will change.

Older readers need not adjust their reading glasses if they feel an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu* coming on. The current inaction echoes Labour's inaction in the 1960s which resulted in the party presiding over more butchery under the Beeching plan than the Conservatives who had commissioned it.

'Dr B. Ching'

"It's John Prescott's idea"

IN THE COURTS

A HIGH court judge, Sir Jeremiah LeRoy Harman, is being appealed against on the extraordinary grounds that it took him two years after hearing a case to deliver his judgment. As the *Times* reported last week, "Alan Boyle QC also accused Mr Justice Harman — famous for claiming in court that he did not know who Bruce Springsteen and Gazza were — of losing court documents and forgetting aspects of the case."

The *Times* itself seems to have forgotten that he is famous for rather more than that. On 13 May 1992 it reported a survey by *Legal Business* magazine which found that he was "the least respected and most disliked" high court judge. On every judicial criterion — fairness, reasonableness, etc — he "fails abysmally and his conduct should therefore disqualify him from being a high court judge".

A few months earlier, on 10 December 1991, the *Times* reported that he had allowed Kevin Maxwell to leave for the US, although it was alleged in court that he might use the trip to make more Maxwell money disappear. Here Harman was on the right side, of course, since Kevin was subsequently found not guilty.

The following day, however, Harman was obliged to go to the high court late in the evening for an emergency hearing on the passport issue. He "started kicking his way through the crowd", and a *Times* hack "caught a very sharp kick on the knee". He then grappled with a man who turned out to be his cab-driver and lashed out at a photographer — who retaliated by kicking the judge in the pants. "I hope no one will call for his resignation," Lord Denning commented afterwards. "We need judges with a bit of character."

Alas, we've still got him. He will be 68 at his next birthday.

Rotten Boroughs

Scotch Corner

DUMFRIES and Galloway Labour councillor Sheila Howat has been found guilty of wrongdoing by the council after moving her daughter to a better property than she was entitled to and not telling council officers.

Howat continued to pay rent on the house her daughter had vacated thus depriving a family on the 1,500-strong waiting list. She said: "I've not done anything wrong. It's commonplace among councillors." Suspended by Labour prior to certain expulsion, she refuses to stand down as a councillor.

● SOUTH Ayrshire council is showing seven of its paintings worth £100,000 at the Brig O'Doon House Hotel in Alloway.

Taxpayers who want something to hang in their lounge could write for more info to hotel owner Bill Costley, who is also chairman of Kilmarnock FC, or to Kilmarnock's chief executive — South Ayrshire council leader Ian Welsh.

● ALLEGATIONS of expenses fiddling are tainting the squeaky reputation of the Scottish National Party in Moray.

Dennis Scaife has resigned as chair of the technical and leisure services committee and has been suspended from the SNP while its NEC waits to speak to him about allegations of bringing the party into disrepute.

Convenor Gordon McDonald is also stepping down having become the victim of a "campaign of character assassination". He claimed £15,471 expenses, £8,736 mileage allowance and an £18,113 allowance which some opposition members think is excessive for a backwater like Moray.

● NORTH Lanarkshire's John Pentland is not the most popular Labour councillor in the lowlands.

Chair of the finance committee, personal assistant to Motherwell & Wishaw MP Frank Roy and local Labour agent and press officer, Pentland fancies being elected to the new Scottish parliament. In a bid to win over the business community he joined forces with traders in impoverished Wishaw and promised them £300,000 of council grants — only to have his application rejected by the grants committee. To rub it in the same sum was given to rival Monklands.

Just Fancy That!

CORBY council's catering contract was recently won by Gardner Merchant — even though its bid did not offer as good a financial deal in every respect as its nearest rival, Cresset Leisure, and nor did it comply with all the instructions to tenderers.

Still, after negotiations — which were denied to other bidders — Gardner Merchant won.

Coincidentally council leader John Murray earns his living thanks to Gardner Merchant's largesse: running the bar and catering at the council's Lodge Park Sports Centre where his name is above the door as licensee.

Bent

MAYORS usually stand down from committees when they take office — but not in Bent where the Lib-Lab coalition rests on the casting vote of Lib Dem mayor Mark Cummins.

Cummins has kept his place on the social services committee and has some brave decisions to make — like voting for social services cuts to outside bodies. One, Age Concern, can now no longer afford to run its after-hospital care facility — which will embarrass the president of Age Concern in Bent, Mark Cummins.

Fights Of The Week

VICTORIA Park councillor Heather Ritchie could be the first woman to be thrown off Glasgow city council's Labour group after she was fined £200 for attacking a community councillor with a car key which she rammed into his mouth.

In Somerset, meanwhile, chicken drumsticks have been flying and there have been calls for county council vice-chairman Humphrey Temperley to resign following a pathetic incident while he was entertaining Czech visitors at the Bridgwater Arts Centre.

A German delegation nextdoor was accidentally delivered all the food. And when the Lib Dem Temperley tried to smuggle chicken and salami back to his guests he was tackled by the Germans' English hosts. A plate of chicken was knocked from his hands and a German woman was hit in the face by flying food.

Coventry

COVENTRY council's Labour group has appointed seven of its finest councillors to supervise the investigation into its fraud-ridden contract services department (*Eyes passim*).

The new crisis committee includes council leader "Honest" John Fletcher; his deputy Arthur Waugh; Waugh's brother, Bob; Sheila Collins; and Peter Lacey. Two Tories have also been drafted to give an air of balance. The first committee, set up when fraud was discovered, was very much against bringing in Inspector Knacker. But this new lot's role is to help the police in a "transparent and honest way", says Fletcher. And who was on the original "Keep Knacker Out" committee? Step forward Arthur Waugh, brother Bob, Sheila Collins and Peter Lacey.

Murkeyside

ANOTHER prison is being built on Merseyside — and just in time.

Two Knowsley councillors were put away in the last 18 months: Bernard Donnally for social security fraud and Stephen Bannister for child sex offences (*Eyes passim*).

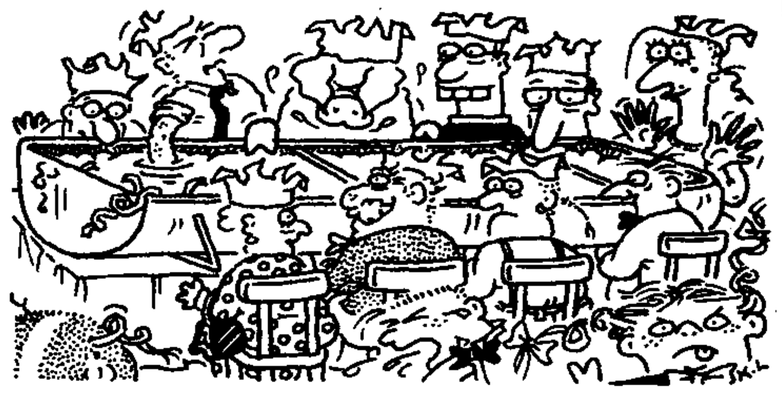
Narrowly escaping jail last month was Coun Barry Ryan, who pleaded guilty to 34 counts of social security fraud totalling £39,000 over 14 years but was let off with five weeks community service. Ryan continues to sit on Knowsley council.

In nearby Liverpool, leading Lib Dem Cathy Hancox was arrested on fraud charges a few days after Ryan's trial finished, and next year two former Liverpool councillors are in court on benefit fraud charges: ex-Hatton groupie Pauline Lowes and Joan Deane.

Pseuds Corner

Fashion designer Tracy Mulligan doesn't entirely have her tongue in her cheek when she says, "Christmas cards are always a problem for me, being minimalist and everything. I find it really difficult to know what to do with them." One successful year she stood her cards in front of the skirting board in the sitting room carpet. Jonathan Rutherfurd-Best, who runs chic event-planners Urban Productions, tosses his cards into a large turquoise bowl. Handbag designer Anya Hindmarch has given up displaying hers at all. "They always look so messy and uncoordinated," she sighs...

If Tracy Mulligan has only just come to grips with cards, she is very imaginative at decorating her flat. One year she bought a bag of Christmas tree cut-offs from the local garden centre and laid them on the floor, Andy Goldsworthy-style, in the shape of a square. Everyone sat around the mock table surrounded by candles, eating Polish food. Other years she has decorated her table with Indian saris from a shop in Whitechapel. "This year I think



I'll do something very minimal on the table and get a trough of something," she says. "I tend to go to Columbia Road market and just get inspired."

Vogue

Maybe the conundrum 'queer is dead... long live queer' is more than apt. *Queer Street 98* will be a space for the anti-assimilationalist dissent, the voice of contention and the attack on the 'new consensus'.

But this space should be treated as one in which its content should be as equally sustained by an intellectual argument, whether queer or post-queer, as much as it is by form and aesthetic.

JACQUIE LAWRENCE
Just Television, Channel Four

NX Branded Luggage

This luggage range has been designed for the demands of the 90's modern urban environment. Created around the rapidly expanding area of techno-fabrics with their urban responsiveness, in conjunction with a strong utilitarian/techno sport bias.

Next Luggage Tag

Ulrika Jonsson — it's a pretty name for a cultural vacuum that most of Britain wants to rush in and fill. I am no different. She appeals to the Freud in me, and armed with the absurd ambition to penetrate to some confusion and sadness in this adaptable Anglo-Swedish honey pot, I set out to discover precisely what makes the uberous über-babe tick...

I talked to the woman for hours, and watched her in action from the audience for one of those fidgeting, overheated TV eternities known as a studio recording session. I talked to her co-stars for hours after that, and ended up in the late-night bar of the Hilton, discussing myself into a stupor on the subject of Ulrika with Stephen Fry and Vic Reeves. And still I had no concrete sense of whom I had met...

WALDEMAR JANUSZCZAK
Sunday Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Kay Jenkinson, Simon Cooper, Rosamund Hyde, Ms C. Morgan.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Ali bahhumbug

Sir,

While I appreciate that one of the purposes of PRIVATE EYE *is to expose the wrongdoings and duplicity of members of "the great and good", surely the time has come for your organ to slacken in its obsessive pursuit of the Al-Fayed family. I, for one, feel that I have now learnt enough about the Al-Fayeds to last me a lifetime and so perhaps now you could turn your attention and column space towards someone else more deserving of it.*

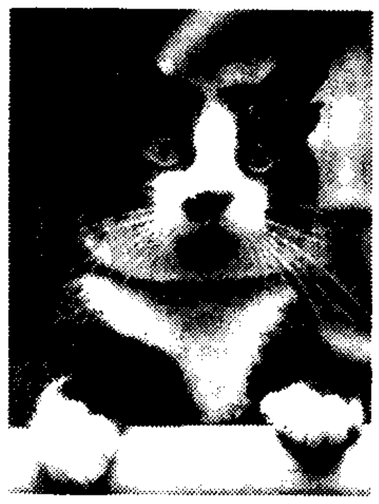
Yours faithfully,
WILLIAM MORECAMBE,

Denbighshire.

PS: Anyway, apart from being Arab, very wealthy and successful, facts that no doubt upset your public school sensibilities, what is it about Mr Al-Fayed and his family that so annoys you?

Lookalike

Cat



Cat

Sir,

I wonder whether any of your readers have noticed the extraordinary resemblance between Humphrey, the ex-Downing Street cat, and Sox, the first mouser at the White House?

Yours faithfully,
JUDY CAVE,

Ashtead, Surrey.

Excess baggage

Sir,

A little more research is in order before you put the boot in on P&O ("Ferry profitable", EYE *938).*

One of any international passenger carriers' responsibilities, written down in law, is the repatriation of stranded travellers or failed/bogus asylum seekers which it carries in the first instance.

The £250 figure quoted is based on the cost of a direct air flight to Slovakia. P&O can't simply sail the Slovaks back to Calais and boot them out onto the dockside, because the jingoistic/forward looking (delete as per your choice) French authorities won't have them set foot on French soil after they've been refused asylum.

Panicky P&O management have instructed staff on the continent to vet potential asylum seekers, and refuse passage to those they consider have little or no chance of success. In doing so, the hapless agents have incurred the wrath of the aforementioned French authorities, who have threatened those responsible for the growing shanty towns around the channel ports with prosecution and lengthy jail terms.

Yours sincerely,
DERMOT MILLER,

Via e-mail.

Christmas Truce 1997

Nutty slack

Sir,

David Gibson (Letters, EYE *938) asks whether there is "slack" built into the railway timetable to absorb late running. I can confirm that this is the case. The extra time was "injected" into timetables to avoid problems under the Passenger's Charter and thus predates privatisation.*

The iniquity of "punctuality" statistics is that they are only measured at the train's final destination. The extra minutes are always added to the very last leg of the journey. Thus, a train can technically arrive significantly late at every station on the route but miraculously arrive "on time" thanks to these extra "charter" minutes. When the train runs normally, staff proudly announce that the final arrival is early!

I have condemned this form of lying in the columns of our magazine which covers railway practice in continental Europe. In general, other European railways have a degree of "recovery time" distributed evenly throughout a train's route.

Long may your organ grow stronger.

DAVID HAYDOCK,

Editor, Today's Railways, France.

Sir,

*David Gibson (*EYE *938) asks if it is possible for railway timetables to contain enough "slack" so that a train on time at one stop can arrive ten minutes early at the next, only a few miles away. Yes: it's known technically as "recovery time", and is a device which was introduced by British Railways in the early 1950s in order to offset delays from signal stops and track repairs. However, whereas until recently recovery time was closely related to scheduled track repairs and, say, ten minutes would be allowed for this between Kings Cross and Leeds (usually with the recovery time split into periods each of three or four minutes), now it seems that EXTRA recovery time has been introduced purely so as to create the illusion that somehow the privatised trains (with exactly the same equipment and manpower) are more reliable than they were a short while ago under BR.*

Yours,
RICHARD OLIVER,

University of Exeter.

Sir,

With regard to Richard Branson's proposed epic voyage, might I recommend he tries the even more challenging adventure of travel between London and Glasgow on a clean and punctual train.

Doomed to failure as usual!

Yours,
COLIN JONES,

Lytham St Annes.

Cold front

Sir,

Watching BBC News 24 on Sunday, 30 November, I heard an off-camera sneeze at exactly the same time on three consecutive weather forecasts. Surely they aren't showing repeats?

J. HYLAND,

Via e-mail.

Black marks

Sir,

Please be factual. The Labour party in Hackney would not exclude black people from its panel. It wouldn't be allowed to by rule.

In any case — and panel interviews are still going on — 11 black candidates have already been selected out of 45 total. Therefore, it follows, there must be black people on the available panel.

Yours sincerely,
TERRY ASHTON,

General Secretary, The Greater London Labour Party.

I-SPY *Champs Elysées*

Submitted by J.R. Peale. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Dome idea

Sir,

Given the concern about the cost and problems associated with the storage of rendered meat and bone meal from BSE infected cattle voiced on FARMING TODAY *on Radio 4 earlier this week, could the ever secretive Mandelson know something about the use of the millennium dome we don't?*

It may not be the ideal site, but it is surely an improvement on loose storage in various sheds around the country. Also, it's estimated 25-year lifespan may give the government enough time to dispose of it all safely.

Yours sincerely,
SIAN GLAESSNER,

London NW1.

"Where's Posh Jesus, and Sporty Jesus, and Scary Jesus...?"

Inn fact

Sir,

*As the compiler of an internet guide to every single pub in Brighton and Hove, I must take issue with Piloti's rant about Marlborough House (*EYE *936). He claims the building will be "damaged or trivialised" by being made into a pub. He also suggests that the building "came down in the world" when it was let to the local School Board.*

Presumably any community use is beneath such a building and all architecturally exquisite property should remain in the hands of dukes and lords — even Marlborough House which, you forgot to mention, was originally built for a local innkeeper. Does a great painting "come down in the world" when it leaves the walls of a toff's ancestral home to be displayed in a museum, where the public, filthy swine that they are, might actually see (or even breathe on) it?

Perish the thought that Marlborough House should actually be open to the public for 12 hours a day 365 days of the year. OK, maybe they might have to knock down a couple of interior walls to make room for the pool table. Perhaps they'll stick the front end of a Chevrolet on one of the pedimented wings (whatever they are), and shove a load of beer barrels where the duke's servants used to live, but I welcome having such a building "trivialised". Because in this sense "trivialised" means the public can actually share in its splendour, and even those who would never set foot in a museum will get to sample its magnificence.

How many of our great old buildings were once inns or coaching houses? It's time to start reversing the process. In the past century the number of pubs in Brighton has dropped by 70 percent while the population has risen by 50 percent. Anything that can redress that balance is welcomed by me.

And while we're at it, the Royal Pavilion would be brilliant as an Indian restaurant.

Yours etc,
ADAM PETERS,

http://www.junkmail.co.uk/pubs.html

Smooth out the rinkles

Sir,

*As a councillor who gave evidence at the public enquiry against the proposed superstore in Richmond, and a long standing reader, I thought your piece in Rotten Boroughs (*EYE *938) was rather rotten, particularly as the council never owned the ice rink.*

The council's main arguments against the proposal were that it would generate excessive traffic and ruin local shops. Unfortunately, the department of transport (under a Conservative minister) would not support our traffic case and the inspector (under a Labour minister after the election) did not accept the arguments of the council and of many local people and amenity groups either on traffic or shopping.

We were advised by our lawyer (not Sue Grabbit & Runne) that the case for an alternative use such as an ice rink (point 4 which we withdrew) would be impossible to sustain because of the enormous sums needed to decontaminate the land and could leave the council with a very large bill for legal costs. The reason for the withdrawal has been made public. The council should not be blamed for a superstore approved by an inspector and opposed by us.

Yours sincerely,
CLLR SERGE LOURIE,

Councillor for Kew and Deputy Leader, London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames.

King size error

Sir,

Despite your penchant for accurate detail, I see that the cover of issue 938 clearly demonstrates that you do not know your crowns from your elbow!

The crowns depicted are those belonging to a King and not a Queen. Shame on you.

Apologies to Ma'am asap or your knighthood will be gone forever!

Yours faithfully,
JOHN McCAFFERTY,

Chichester.

The First Supper

Shop lifting

Sir,

*As a resident of Altrincham, Cheshire, I was most annoyed to see Stowell's cartoon (*EYE *923) depicting our main shopping street as being almost entirely made up of charity shops. This is most misleading. For the record, there is a McDonald's on the corner just outside the frame of the cartoon.*

PHILLIPA GRATRIX,

Altrincham.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"...I've lost count of the times I've played in that fixture. Each one was a memorable occasion..."
TREVOR STEVEN, Radio 4
(Matthew Gingell)

"If Ronnie O'Sullivan's going to win this match, he's going to have to win it himself."
CLIVE EVERTON, BBC2
(Tony Causey)

"They're not doing as well in the league as they've done."
ROY HODGSON, BBC
(Dean Trotter)

"Ferguson hasn't scored since the opening day of the season... he's not a natural striker." (5 mins later) "Ferguson. At last a goal from him... natural instincts from a former Scottish striker."
ROB PALMER, Sky Sports
(Colin Hamilton)

Zoe Ball: *...So, would you buy this record?*
Aaron Carter: *Yeah — maybe to listen to.*
BBC1
(Peter Cubbin)

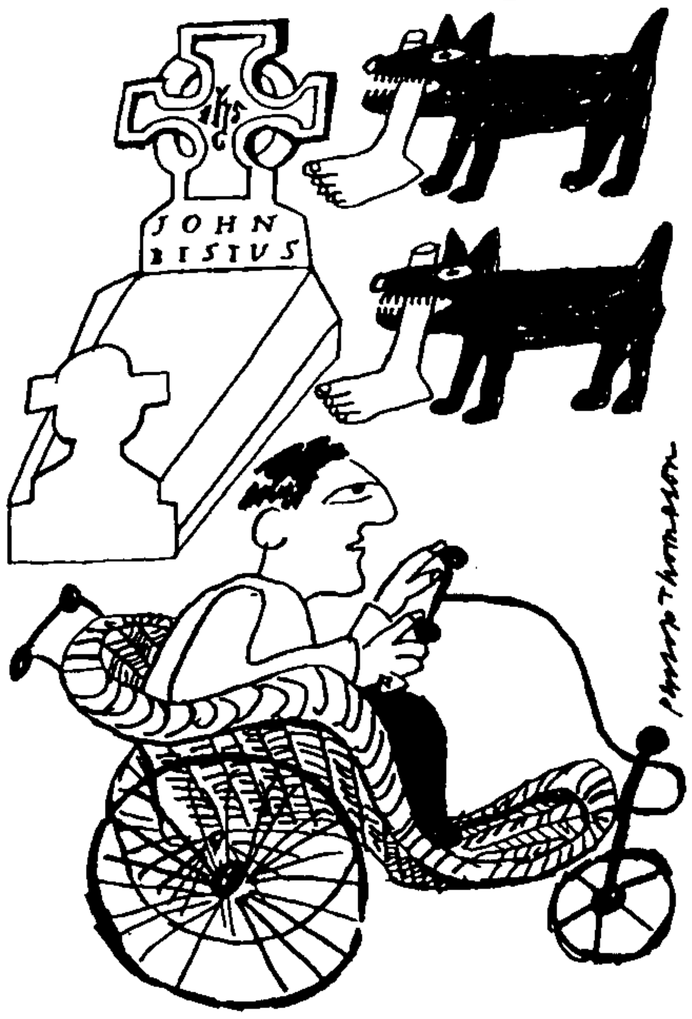
HOM SAP

BY DAVID AUSTIN

WE CAN'T ALL BE LUCKY. SOME PEOPLE HAVE JOBS..
H.S. EMPLOYMENT AGENCY
.. WHICH STOP THEM BEING WITH THEIR FAMILIES AT CHRISTMAS.
H.S. EMPLOYMENT AGENCY
FOR FIFTY QUID I CAN GET YOU ONE.
H.S. EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

FUNNY OLD WORLD

"If it was just a finger, I would probably not complain," John Bisius told a reporter from Read On magazine, "but we are talking about half of me. Surely I should know where the mining company buried my legs, or whether they burned them or threw them to the dogs."



Bisius recalled how he lost his legs in April 1981, after an underground accident at the Zvishavane mine in Zimbabwe. "My legs were amputated in the mine's hospital. When I recovered, the mine owners gave me a second-hand wheelchair and found me work as a receptionist and office attendant. They were so kind that I didn't like to ask them what they'd done with my legs.

But now that I am retired and thinking about death, I want to know what happened to them. I am thankful to the doctors, but I never signed any document allowing them to dispose of my legs. If my bones were buried, I want to dig them up. I will keep them and wait for my other part to die, so that I can be buried in one grave.

I have never heard of a person being buried in two graves." *(The Herald [Harare], 3/10/97. Spotter: Brian Purcell)*

—o—

"Queer Middle Ages — An Interdisciplinary Conference to be held at The Graduate Center, City University of New York, November 5-7, 1998.

"This conference is dedicated to 'queering' the Middle Ages: to the pursuit of methodologies of interpretation and documentation of the same-sex choice of women and men who resisted heteronormativity in their sexual and affective bonds during the period we have come to call the 'Middle Ages'... While queer studies have made significant impact in the study of the early modern period, the Middle Ages have only sporadically been the object of 'queering,' and we have only begun to document lives shaped by same-sex desire.

"Sessions are being organised in the following areas: Brooten's Work and its Relevance to the Queer Middle Ages. Crossdressing. Feminist Theory and Queer Theory. Homoaffectivity in German Culture. Modern Queer Appropriations. Queer Iberia.

"We welcome paper proposals for the sessions listed above, as well as proposals for new sessions. All work on the Queer Middle Ages will be given consideration. Detailed proposals for sessions are due by September 15, 1998." *(City University of New York Mailbase, November 1997. Spotter: E. A. Keith)*

—o—

"Why should I apologise?" asked Darrel Hadley, manager of The Outback Inn in Waikato. "Most of our customers are students, and they all think it's a great idea. In fact, we've already had over a hundred entries."

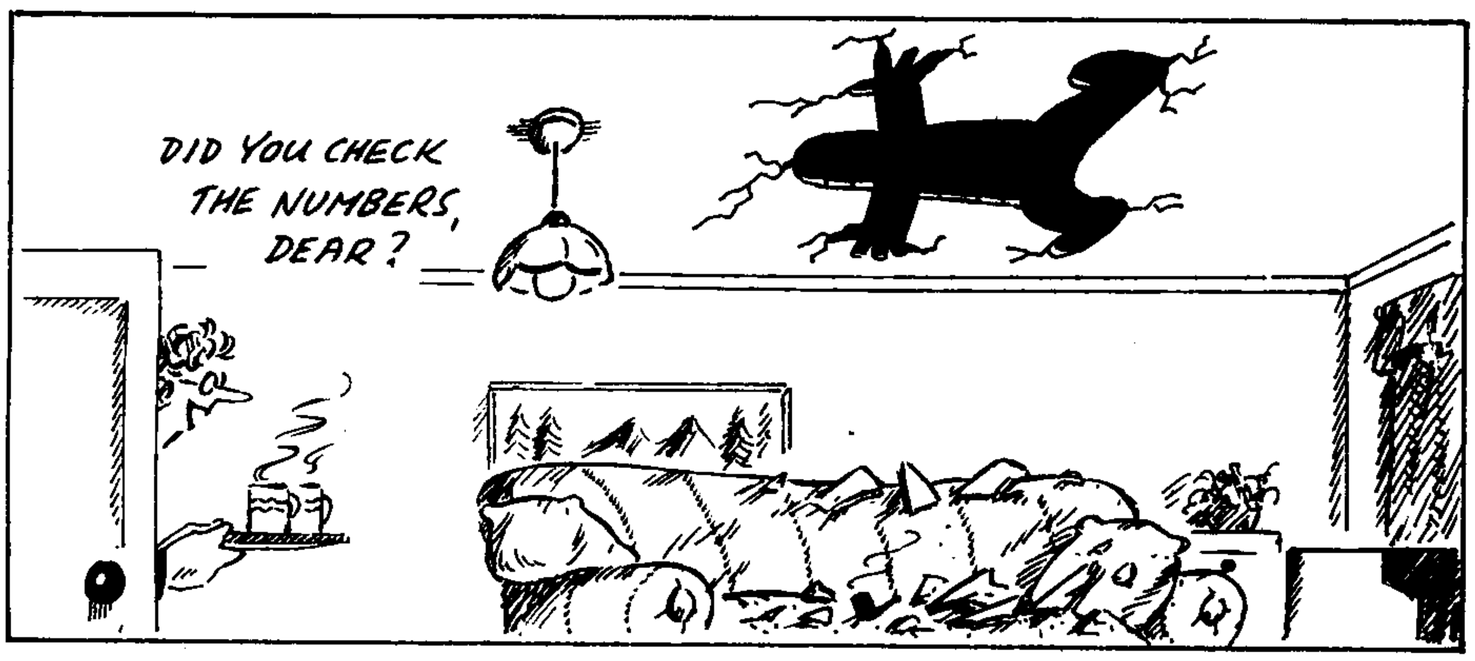
Hadley, whose pub has launched a contest to find Waikato's filthiest student flat, has been verbally attacked by outraged landlords. "It's horrific," said a spokesman for the Waikato Association of Property Managers. "This contest is blatantly encouraging students to trash their flats. We've heard stories of tenants urinating and defecating on the carpets, leaving dead animals on their doorsteps, of floors covered in broken beer bottles, and chickens roaming freely indoors. The students in one flat locked dogs and chickens inside their flat in a bid to increase their chances of winning. Dog faeces and chicken droppings littered the flat, the walls were spattered with blood where the dogs had ripped the chickens apart, and we found a dead calf in the living room, with a carrot in its anus. The students just laughed, and said they were going to move out immediately after the contest.

"But they were wrong, because we evicted them there and then." (New Zealand News, 24/9/97. Spotter: Tony Szymkow)

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

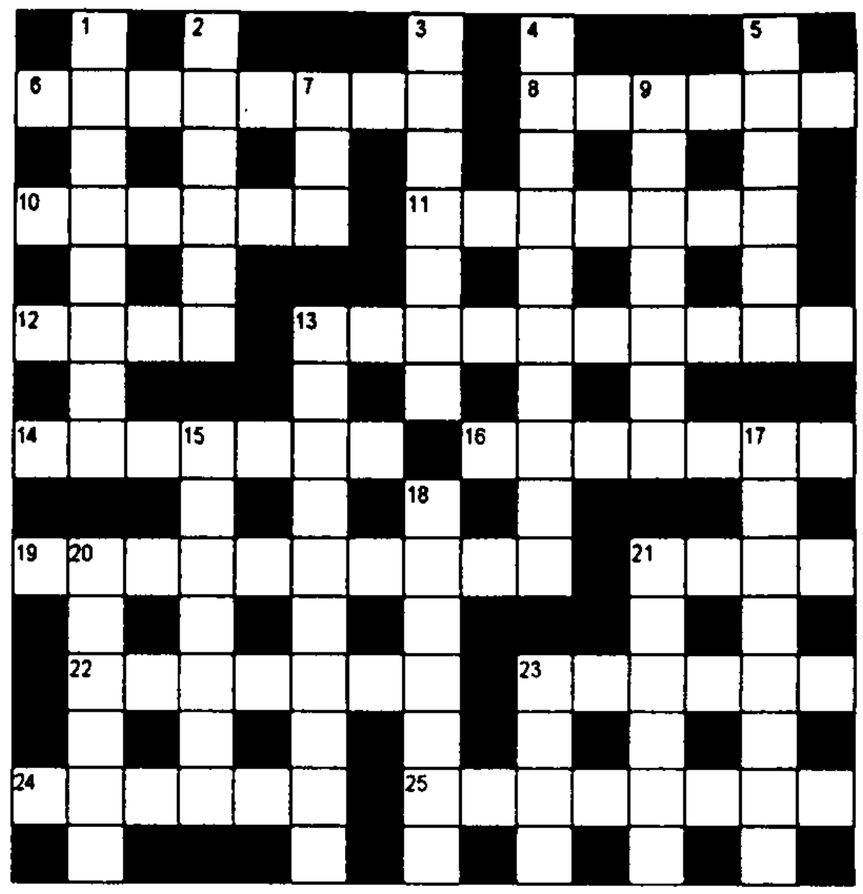
The Lottery Winners

TURNER



EYE CROSSWORD 94

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

6 As all may see, new Labour's started cosying up to horrible criminal (8)
8 The first pisspoor issue produced by Murdoch maybe? (6)
10/11 Spice Girl fan, bloke with his own column needs piece to lead off (6,7)
11 (see 10)
12/23ac. Turn round and cut the balls off a press secretary? (4,6)
13 Brown bread's back after accident (10)
14 Caught penetrating tart on floor — erection gone! (7)
16 The flighty sport of being a bad novelist and seeking to control capital? (7)
19 Rip-off by pop star, one given to egotistical tantrums (5,5)
21 Two-party institution that's had its day (4)
22 The Sun: it so excited the sort who plays with himself (7)
23 (see 12)
24 Group of players' testes pointlessly mangled — adults only allowed in (6)
25 Old woman, iron ruler, well-known beneficiary of relief by soldiers (8)

DOWN

1 Cops co-operating in quaint, er, politeness? (8)
2 Ex-Cabinet minister reduced to promoting a diet book (6)
3 Long hesitant murmur by Jack being embosomed by Ms Anderson — a sticky treat (4,3)
4 Sort of people's charter our John was made to sign (5,5)
5 Stick a sign around one abusive female (6)
7 Pleasure Kitty endlessly (3)
9 Appropriate leader of Tories, Hague initially – what a bomber! (7)
13 Labour: a messy and painful experience? (10)
15 Arrived at film studio property known for its fabulously well-paid directors (7)
17 Set to get a single from this awful station? (5,3)
18 Division of members (7)
20 Ham actress Jane after MiddleMarch (6)
21 Do some car maintenance to come down from the effects of a drug? (6)
23 Pisspoor sort of pudding (4)

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 17.12.97. Entries to "Crossword", Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 93

Winner: JEFF GYI

ACROSS: 6 G-string 8 Bigotry 10 Lord Archer 11 Ritz 12 Contra 13 (see 21) 14 Funny Old World 18 Lynch mob 21/13 Social Services 23 Anon 24 Ozone layer 25 Germaine 26 Uppity.

DOWN: 1 Credit 2 Entreaty 3 Mirror 4 Courtier 5 Writhe 7 Show-off 9 Whistle-blower 15 Nickname 16 Washed up 17 Dialect 19 Yankee 20 Moonie 22 Crappy.

KNEE HEADS FOR NIGERIA

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man In Marseilles Watching The Transvestites In The Red Light District *(shurely 'The World Cup Draw'? Ed.)*

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations last night when an ashen-faced Ron Knee, 59, announced that he was taking over Nigeria's national football side.

His decision follows his controversial departure from Neasden FC last week. The tight-lipped supremo told reporters:

"I have done everything there is for a manager to do in English football — apart from win. This is a unique opportunity for me to take the young Nigerian side into the world final of 3007."

Knee angrily denied allegations that he was selling out his principles for money.

"I *am* a manager of principle," he said. "I will only work for people who pay me a lot of cash — and Neasden were reluctant to do this in the latter stages of my career, ie the last 20 years."

Here Today, Ogone Tomorrow

A spokesman for the Nigeria side, General M'urderer, said: "We would kill for a manager like Ron Knee and will do so if we do not get him."

Late Score

Kwik-Fit International Friendly

Neasden FC 0
Mandela United 0
(Match adjourned)

Those Paxman Questions The Girls Couldn't Answer

by Our Universally Challenged Staff **Bambi Gasgoigne**

A RECORD poor performance was achieved last week by the girls of New Labour College, Westminster in an embarrassing fiasco presided over by TV's quizmaster Jeremy Paxman. The girls failed to give the correct answer to any questions at all. Here are some of those questions and the answers they gave:

Paxman: Why are you cutting single parent benefit?

Harman: Er... Posh Spice... er...

Paxman: Why did you change your policy on tobacco sponsorship of Formula One?

Jowell: Er... Beethoven's Fifth? Winston Churchill?

Paxman: Would you legalise cannabis?

Short: Yes... I mean no... er...

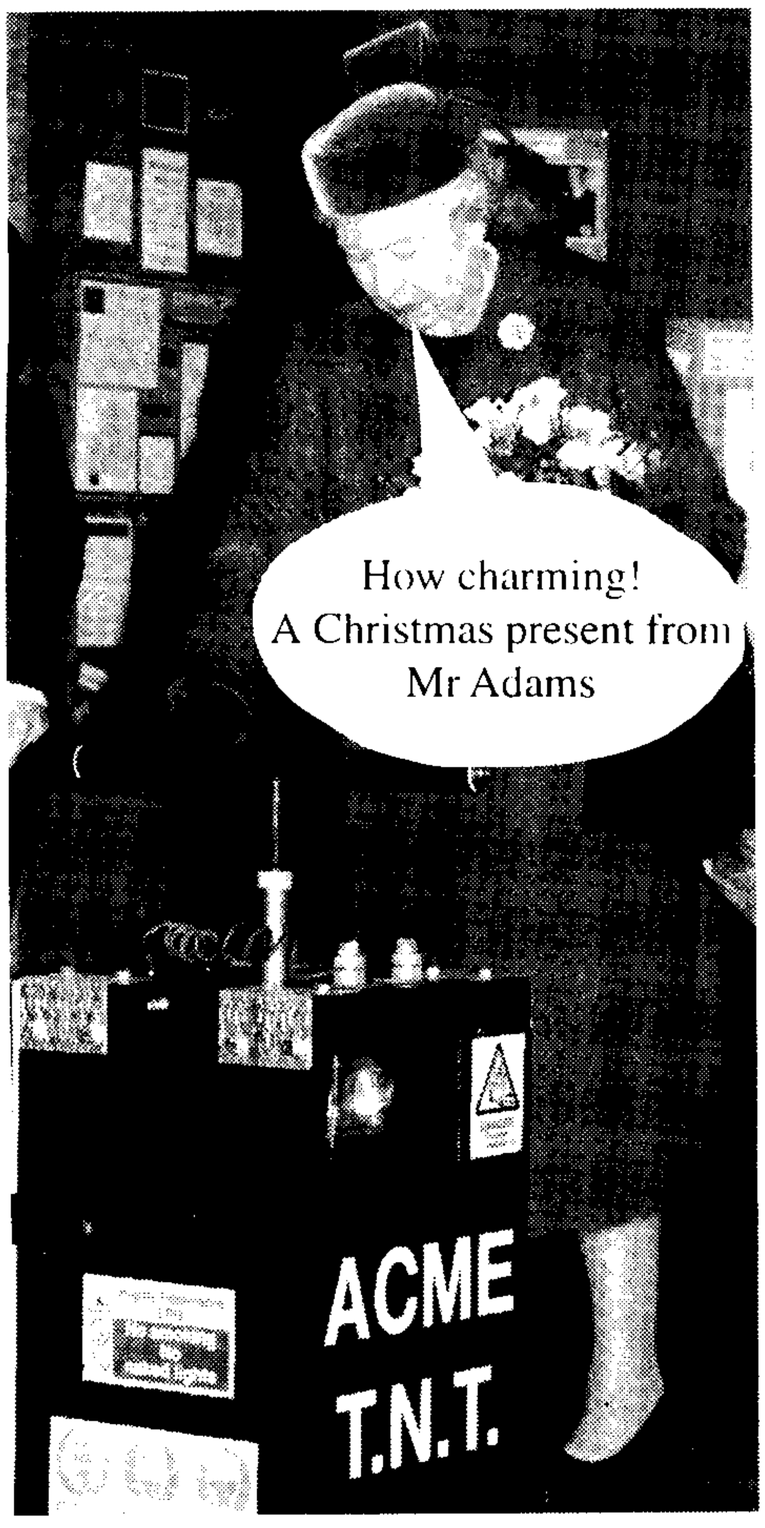
Paxman: Why is Gerry Adams coming over for Christmas?

Mowlam: Er... alpha rays... parthenogenesis?... geiger counter... The Muppets... er...

Paxman: This is embarrassing.

(Continued p. 94)

GERRY XMAS!



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Stephane Grappelli, Billy Bremner, Lady Kanga Tryon, Lord Wyatt of Weeford and Big Daddy

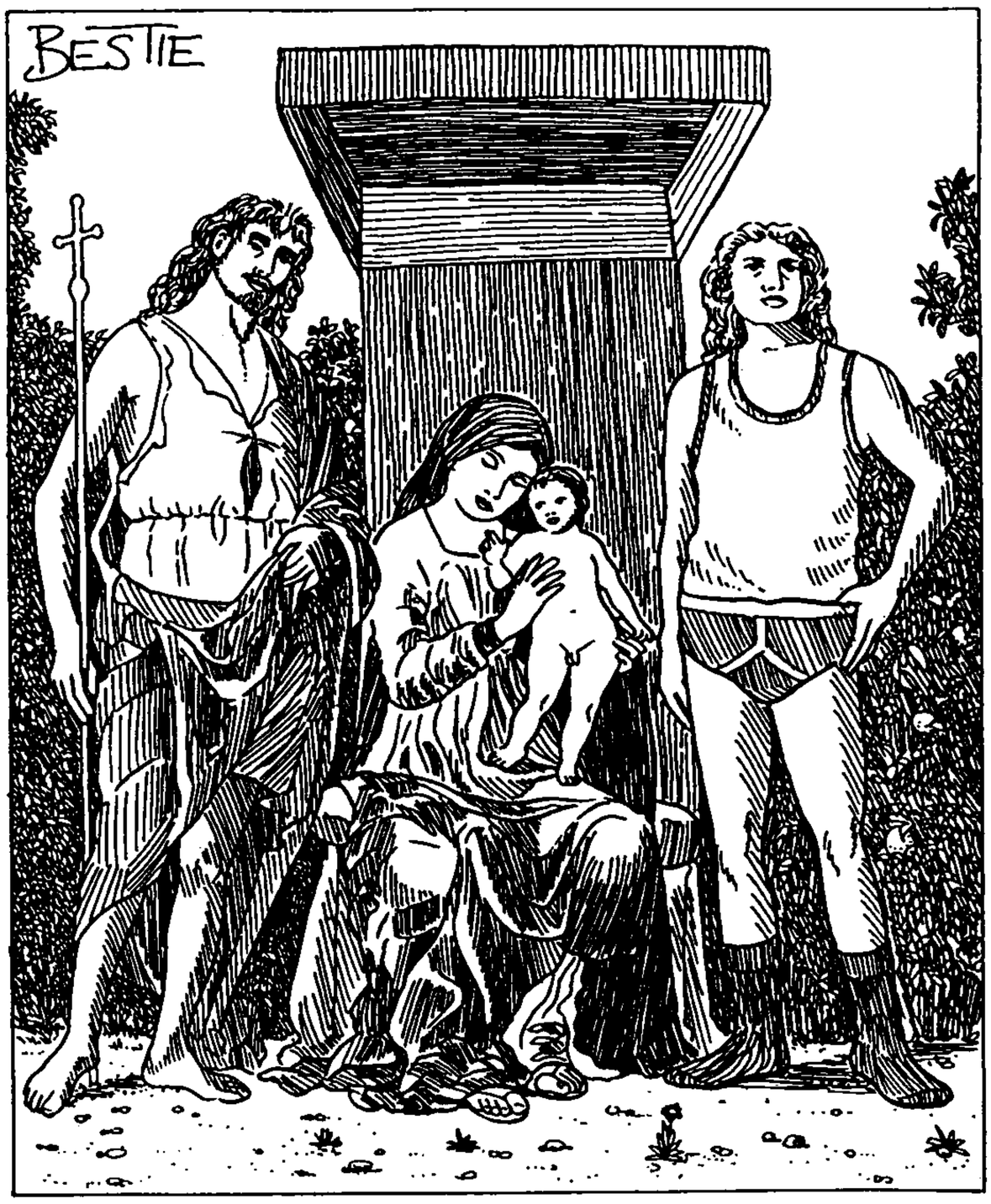
So. Farewell
Then.

To all of
The above.

Or below
As may
Be the case

For some
Of them.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



MADONNA, ST. JOHN AND ST. MICHAEL

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo

Christmas is nearly upon us, a time of "goodwill to all persons" *(Luke 2, 8-9, New Labour Bible)*.

But, honestly, sometimes I wonder whether the message has got through to this parish.

I am thinking in particular of those who have been all too quick to criticise me for my friendship with Mr Robinson, who very kindly let me, Cherie and the children use his house in Tuscany last summer for a wonderful break away from it all!

And that's not all Geoffrey has contributed to the parish out of the goodness of his heart, and at considerable expense to himself!

Alright, so Geoffrey is a comparatively rich man, and he makes no bones about it.

But why on earth should this disqualify him from playing a major role in this ministry?

Look, when The Three Kings turned up at Bethlehem, no one said to them "Sorry, you're too rich — take your donations elsewhere".

They welcomed The Three Rich Men and they became a vital part of Our Lord's mission to build a new, better and more modern world.

The same kind of carping criticism has been made against several other very good friends of the parish: Mr Simon, Mr Ecclestone, Mr Davies, Mr Earl and many others who, though not poor themselves, have the interests of the poor very much at heart.

Contrary to what some ill-informed parishioners still seem to believe, there is nothing in the teaching of the Church to suggest that you cannot serve God and Mammon (wealth creation).

Very often it is the people who are most successful in making money who can then use their experience to the best effect in teaching the poor how to help themselves!

And isn't that what Christmas is all about?

It's not all about presents and handouts to single parents, as some people seem to think.

After all, wasn't Mary herself a single mum, and look how she coped, without any help from the state.

So, remember, it's easier for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than a poor man *(Matthew 5, 28-30, NLB)*.

And on that positive note, Cherie and I would like to wish all parishioners a very, very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Yours ever,

Tony

FROM THE CHURCHWARDEN MR MANDELSON

I'm pleased to say that my plans for the hugely successful Millennium Tent are going extremely well. People still say to me, "It's all very well, churchwarden, to spend £200,000 on a tent, but what's going to be in it?" I say to them, "It's none of your business, Mr Kaufman. Just wait and see and stop complaining". But I will give one secret away. The kids are going to really love it, because we've got a really exciting interactive bouncy castle lined up for them, specially designed by the Sixth Form Technology Department at St Albion's School. But no more questions please. Just rest assured. The tent will go up and will be very, very popular. And anyone who says otherwise is guilty of betraying Tony, the Church and me.

P.M. Co-ordinator of the PCC
Tent Experience Committee

A Christmas Thought –

by Mr Brown, Parish Treasurer

In the famous carol about Good King Wenceslaus, we read about the poor man who had to go out on a very cold winter's night, when the temperature was probably minus 5 degrees Celsius without the chill factor, to gather winter fuel. Well, if he lived in this parish today, he wouldn't need to collect firewood, thanks to my £2 Pensioners' Fuel Supplement, which will become operable whenever the temperature falls below the required threshold for seven continuous days.GB

Very good idea, Gordon! Who says we're not helping the poor? TB

Cherie Writes:

A big thank you to everyone who has written to me asking what happened to Humphrey the Vicarage Cat. You'll be glad to know he's alive and well and living elsewhere in the parish, due to his increasing age! Contrary to what some people have apparently been suggesting, Tony and I are very fond of all animals, particularly cats (and foxes!). The problem was that Humphrey was just too old to cope with all the stresses and strains of living in a busy, modern, go-ahead vicarage. So, after discussing it with Mr Mandelson, we decided to send Humphrey to a really quiet, peaceful place where he will have no more worries! CB

PS. Well written, Cherie! TB

YOUR LETTERS

Dear Tony,

May I say through your columns how much I admire and respect Mr Mandelson, the Church Warden. There are few genuinely good and honest men left in the world today and he is one of them. God bless you Peter and may God rot anyone who criticises you or indeed me.

Yours
S. Fry,
The Common Room,
St. Albion's Sixth Form College.

Dear Tony,

I don't know if you remember, but you promised, before you arrived in the parish, that you would look after all the teenage girls who, through no fault of their own, became pregnant, thus getting trapped in a cycle of

Yours faithfully
Mr K. Livingstone,
Newts 'R' Us, The Aquatic Pet Centre, High Street

The Editor Mr Campbell reserves the right to cut all letters for reasons of space.

(Quite right. Let's do our bit to save forests! TB)

WINNER OF THE "PEOPLE'S CAROL COMPETITION"

The Tony and the Cherie
When they are both full grown
Of all the people in the world
They're the best I've ever known.

R. Attenborough, aged 97,
Dunfilmin Rest Home

Notices

● Thanks to our very old friend **Mr Jenkins** of **"Hillhead"** who, although he has been retired for many years, can still make a very valuable contribution. Roy has agreed to spend the next few years looking into all our voting procedures. He has very generously agreed not to accept a fee, but will instead be rewarded with a case of his favourite wine from one of Mr Robinson's vineyards in Italy!

The Daily Tudorgraph

2 groats

Lorde Chancellor 'Ye Most Powerful Man In Ye Kingdom' Claims Ye Lorde Chancellor

by Our Political Staff *Robert Fox's Martyrs*

CARDINAL Wolfey, ye Lorde Chancellor, yefterday tolde ye afsembled clerkes and scribes: "Mak no miftake — I am ye greateft of ye King's minifters, including ye King himfelf."

Ye Chancellor hath verily made his marke in recent weeks, with ye Eftablifhment of ye Star Chamber, where he tortureth ye King's other minifters with his mightily tedious harangues on 'good governance'.

Crofs Head

Although of humble byrthe, Wolfey hath spared no expenfe in refurbifhing his State Aoartments in gold leaf, and boafting to all and sundrie about his wealth and power.

Said an infider yefterday: "He sitteth like an almighty spider at ye centre of ye web of government, controlling all things."

And yet there is already murmuring at ye over-mightie Chancellor by some of ye King's favourites.

One unnamed courtier said: "He is getting too great for his boots. Who doth Wolfey think he is? My Lorde Irvine of Lairg?"

Noftradamus, ye lorde of ye horofscopes, writes: "Lord Lairgover will become a major figure of ye twentieth century, beftriding ye reign of King Tony the VIIIth (rate) like a colofsus. He will be known for his boaft that he was ye moft powerful Chancellor since Mafter Wolfey. but he soon fell from power and was totally forgotten."

Weather with Mafter Fifhe

Reft afsured, it will be verie colde for ye next two centuries. Ye River Thames will freeze over. But ye greate Tempefte of 1703 will not happen.

Ye Monafteries To Be Privatifed

by Our Religious Correfpondent *TV's Thomas More*

Plans are afoot, we can reveal, for ye Government to sell off ye monafteries.

Ye houfes of religion are said by minifters to be "wafteful" and "obfolete in ye new, moderne England".

Among thofe expected to bid for ye monafteries are Mafter Richard Branfon, Miftrefs Gloag of Stagecoach and sundrie other "fatte cattes".

Your Executions Tonight

The following will be publicly beheaded on ye Tower Hill for ye entertainment of ye populace: Miftrefs Parker Bowleyn, ye friende of ye Kinge (admifsion free)

On Other Pages

What Rubbifh From Mafter Holbein! by Brian R. Sewell 8

Why Oh Why Do We Have To Have This Ghaftly New Prayer Booke? afks Mafter A.N. Wilfon 10

Straw also confirmed he would abandon the controversial policy of interring terrorist suspects without trial.
Wall Street Journal

At one stage, his weight ballooned to 23st, he was taking 14 tables a day and eating two chickens per meal.
Evening Standard

New Books

The Penguin Book of Newspaper Articles

by Christopher Spivester
(Cutandpaste Books, 8,977pp, £25)

A FASCINATING collection of old newspaper articles collected by author Spivester from piles of old newspapers from around the world. Spivester has come up with some real gems here, including a 1922 news report from the *New Dworkin Bee* describing how a local man, Mr Morton Humdinger, had slipped on the ice outside his porch and sprained his ankle. British readers will be grateful for the reprinting of an article from the 1956 *Brentford and Ealing Gazette* revealing the approval by the council of plans for the rebuilding of a bus shelter on Acton Road.

TM

GNOME XMAS M

A Vocal Memorial to Diana

THE WHISTLING CATERPILLARS OF PARAGUAY

For centuries the hill farming peasants of Paraguay have secretly cultivated an extraordinary caterpillar that can actually sing. Known locally as "el cantapillar", this remarkable creature can learn up to a hundred different songs before it becomes a butterfly, when it loses its amazing talent!

Warning: The life cycle of the caterpillar is 28 days. Allow 4 weeks for delivery.

Price: 37p (+p&p)

In Respectful Memory of Diana

'THE SPICE GULLS'

AMUSING hand-crafted porcelain figures of seagulls dressed up as the world's most popular all-girl singing group! A guaranteed conversation piece which will hugely enhance any mantelpiece or fireplace! Choose your "Spice Gull" favourite!

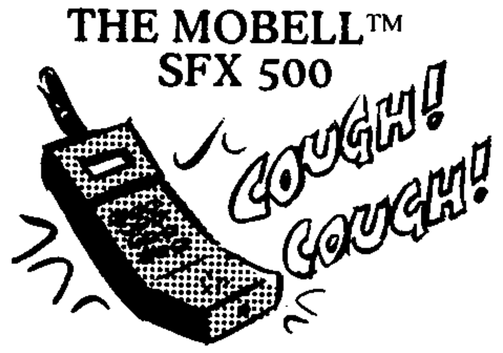
Price: £199.99 each

Choice of Gulls: Posh, Ginger, LaLa, Tinky Winky, Peregrine Worsthorne

A Ringing Tribute to Diana, Princess of Wales

Mobile phone users! Beat the ban with

THE MOBELL™ SFX 500

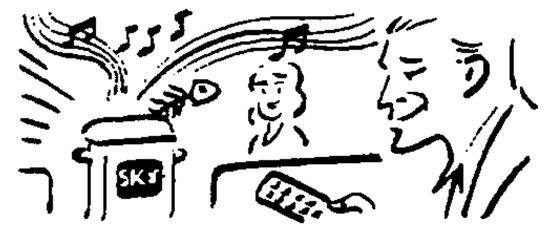


MORE places than ever are forbidding the use of mobile phones on their premises but now you can beat the ban with this latest invention from South Korea. Instead of the tell-tale ring, the SFX 500 simply coughs, so no one knows it's a mobile! *It's good to cough!*

Price: £3,999.95 (Battery Extra)

A Wonderful Souvenir to the Memory of Diana

FULL STEREO-IN-WHEELIE-BIN ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE 55SFX



MORE and more councils are insisting on wheelie bins for refuse and won't empty them unless they are put outside your house! How to fill the long walk from garden to gate? **Simple.** Fit this special system to your bin and have full stereo CD, cassette player and TV at your fingertips. ● Receives Sky, L!ve-TV, and the HotNight Adult Channel from Holland.

Price: £2,299.99

From The Gnome Bygones Collection

To Celebrate the Life and Work of Diana, Princess of Wales

Celtic Underwear Set

SOMETHING for the ladies this Christmas! Based on underwear worn by Queen Boadicea on her wedding night, this highly exotic set of bra, panties and suspender belt is made from genuine sheepskin, trimmed in hand-tooled leather and decorated with carved flint.

Price: £1,732 per set

One size only (XL)

Relive the nation's darkest hour with the

GNOME HOME CONDOLENCE BOOK

NOW you, your friends and neighbours can register your private thoughts on the tragic loss of Diana, the Princess of Wales in the privacy of your own home.

No more queuing in Asda or outside Kensington Palace! Just place the Gnome Book of Condolence on your hall table, by your telephone or in some other prominent place in your home, and ask fellow-mourners to record their tributes in prose or verse. To guide their thoughts, the Gnome Book comes complete with 10 suggested tributes taken from the Sun newspaper.

● *Plays Candle In The Wind on continuous loop.*

Each volume is hand-crafted from leather-style Gnomitex with leatherette bookmark imprinted with portrait of TV's Earl Spencer.

Price: £5,612 (plus VAT)

In loving memory of Diana

Cooks and Housewives! Say Goodbye to Untidy Egg Misery with the new

EGG-o-TIDY

THIS amazingly simple culinary device will store up to six eggs in complete safety, each in its own individual cushioned compartment!

Simply remove your newly purchased eggs from unsuitable packaging and place in the elegant stripped pine EGG-o-TIDY!

● *Over 2 million sold in Finland.*

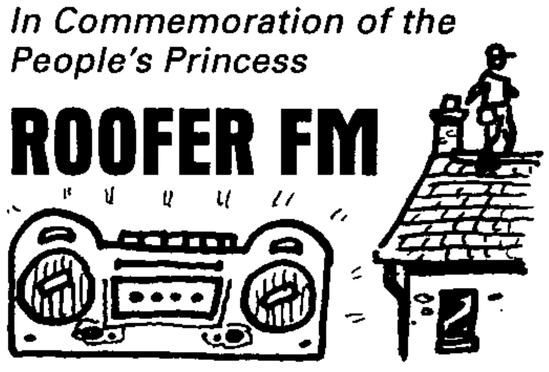
● Price £39.99 ●

Plays "O God Our Help in Ages Past"

NEW FROM OSLO

In Commemoration of the People's Princess

ROOFER FM



Ideal for builders and roofers, this latest advance in radio technology automatically finds any heavy metal record being played on the airwaves and tunes itself in. And no fussy volume controls either! Factory preset at 2,000 decibels, just switch on and get on with the job!

Colours: Plaster White, Splattered Paint and Cement Grey.

Price: £99.99

Your hair will never look lovelier after using

Chicken Soup SHAMPOO

To celebrate the life of Diana, Princess of Wales, Gnome's House of Organic Health & Beauty are introducing this incredible new product. Remember: chicken soup contains all the essential vitamins to maintain healthy hair, giving it a silky gloss and body.

● **Products not tested on animals.**

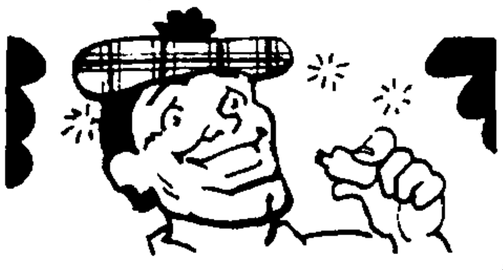
Price: £63.95 for 2oz bottle

To Remember Our Princess By

Run down? Impotent? Hair loss? Try the amazing

Oil of Lairg

This ancient Scottish remedy, distilled from the peat bogs of the Hebridean island of Lairg, cures all known ailments. Says Mr T.B. of Islington, *"My whole life changed when my wife gave me a bottle of Lairgoil. Now I am on top of the world."*



275 millilitre bottle only £299.99

(EU approved)

A Memento For Diana

Terrify your friends and family with the

MANDELSON Horror Mask

HOURS of Yuletide fun with this lifelike rubber-latex likeness of the world's most hated man!

● **Price: 2p a dozen**

Government Health Warning: Not to be worn in front of Labour MPs as it may frighten them to death.

***A proportion of all profits made by these**

EMORIAL* MAIL MART

OUT OF RESPECT FOR DIANA

Blackmail your friends with the

FAYED FUGGIN' BUGGIN' KIT

Designed by Egypt's top surveillance expert, the Fayed Home Bugging kit enables you to record and video your friends and neighbours when they're up to no good! Includes: satellite spy camera, phone-tapper, telescopic microphone, in-bedroom bugs and a host of otherstate-of-the-art eavesdropping devices.

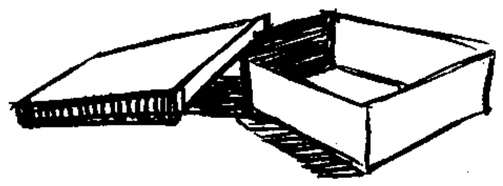
Price: £3,412,000 (plus VAT)

"I deeply resent this advertisement," *M. Cole, London.*

A Diana Memorial Keepsake

Amuse your friends with

'THE FULL MONTY OUTFIT'



Recreate all the fun of the film in your own living room!

Contents include: ● **No shirt** ● **No trousers** ● **No socks.**

Price: £139.95

A REFLECTIVE GIFT FOR DIANA

'THE SOUND OF SILENCE'

PARENTS! Are you fed up with the sound of screaming toddlers? Then this unique CD is for you — 8 hours' worth of continuous, complete silence. Just turn it up to full volume to drown out those irksome infants! **Price: £734.99**

The People's Princess Remembered Forever

Great News for Motorcyclists and Fish Lovers! Introducing

HELM-O-TANK

Thanks to this ingenious device from Bilbao, the bike 'n' fish capital of Europe, there's no longer any need to leave your pet fish at home. Simply fill the upper section of the transparent fibreglass Helm-O-Tank with water, drop in your favourite finny friend and vroom! vroom! off you both go together.

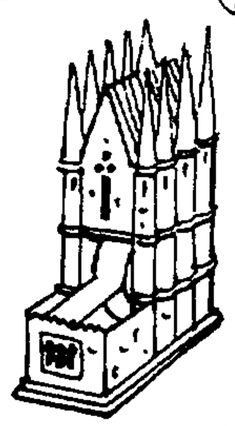
£587 *(water extra)*

Suitable for: Goldfish, Guppy, Basking Shark.

From The Gnome Bygones Collection

To give thanks for the life of the People's Princess

The Gothic Sellotape Dispenser



NO OFFICE or home should be without an authentic hand-carved granite sellotape dispenser. Weighing no more than 20 kilos and measuring 15 sq ft, this historic 12th Century artefact will fit easily into any work or domestic environment.

Price: £699.95 *(Roll of tape extra)*

Plays ***Cwm Rhondda***

A Commemorative Diana Heirloom

Become rich and successful with the

LUCKY STONE OF HAMILTON

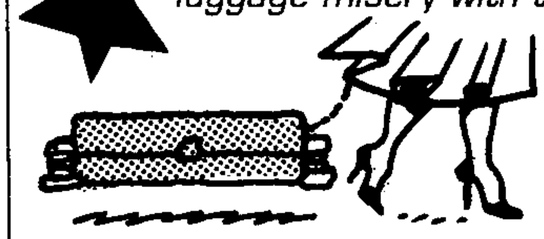
For centuries workers in the hidden Tatton salt mines have believed in the magical powers of the lucky stone of Hamilton. This smooth, oily stone will enable you to win court cases, hold onto your job and ensure your popularity as a TV performer.

Price: £5,000 in brown envelope (allow 28 years for delivery)

Plays Thaxted Theme by Gustav Holst.

A TRIBUTE TO THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

Say goodbye to heavy luggage misery with the **HOVERCASE**



Thanks to this revolutionary breakthrough in baggage technology, you will never have to carry around those heavy suitcases again!

Just switch on the "Hovercase" and watch it rise 6 inches (18.368 centimetres) above the ground.

Hey presto! Case is light as a feather!

COLOURS: Conrad Black, Rabbi Blue, Gordon Brown

Price: £10,850. *Plays John Tavener's Orthodox Requiem Mass in G Minor*

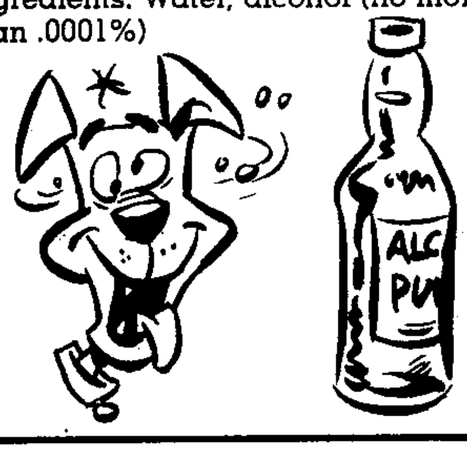
ANIMAL LOVERS ***To Preserve the Spirit of the Princess of Hearts***

AN IDEAL GIFT FOR MAN'S BEST FRIEND

ALCO-PUPS

Why should Rover miss out on Xmas revelry? Treat him to an Alco-Pup™!

Ingredients: Water, alcohol (no more than .0001%)



■ **Price: £37.99 per bottle**

TELLY LOVERS! *A Token of Gratitude for Diana*

Don't miss out on the amazing

BEARD-GONE!

This Korean digital marvel simply plugs into your television and hey presto! thanks to the unique facial hair scrambling facility all the irritating beards on screen are removed. *HOORAY!*

Works on: ● Richard Branson ● Rory McGrath ● The Late Show's Mark Lawson

Price: £399.99 *(excluding batteries)*

In loving and lasting memory of Diana.

Supermarket shoppers can't afford to be without

THE XV6 TROLLEY EMERGENCY SET

erfected by supermarket scientists in Springfield, Massachusetts, the XV6 enables you to exit a packed supermarket in no time at all! Simply switch on the XV6 flashing light and police style siren and head for the exit! Crowds will clear as you rush through!

Price: £799.95

■ *Plays Psalm 23* ■

A Diana Gift to Treasure

Now... A True To Life

DIANA CANDLE IN THE WIND

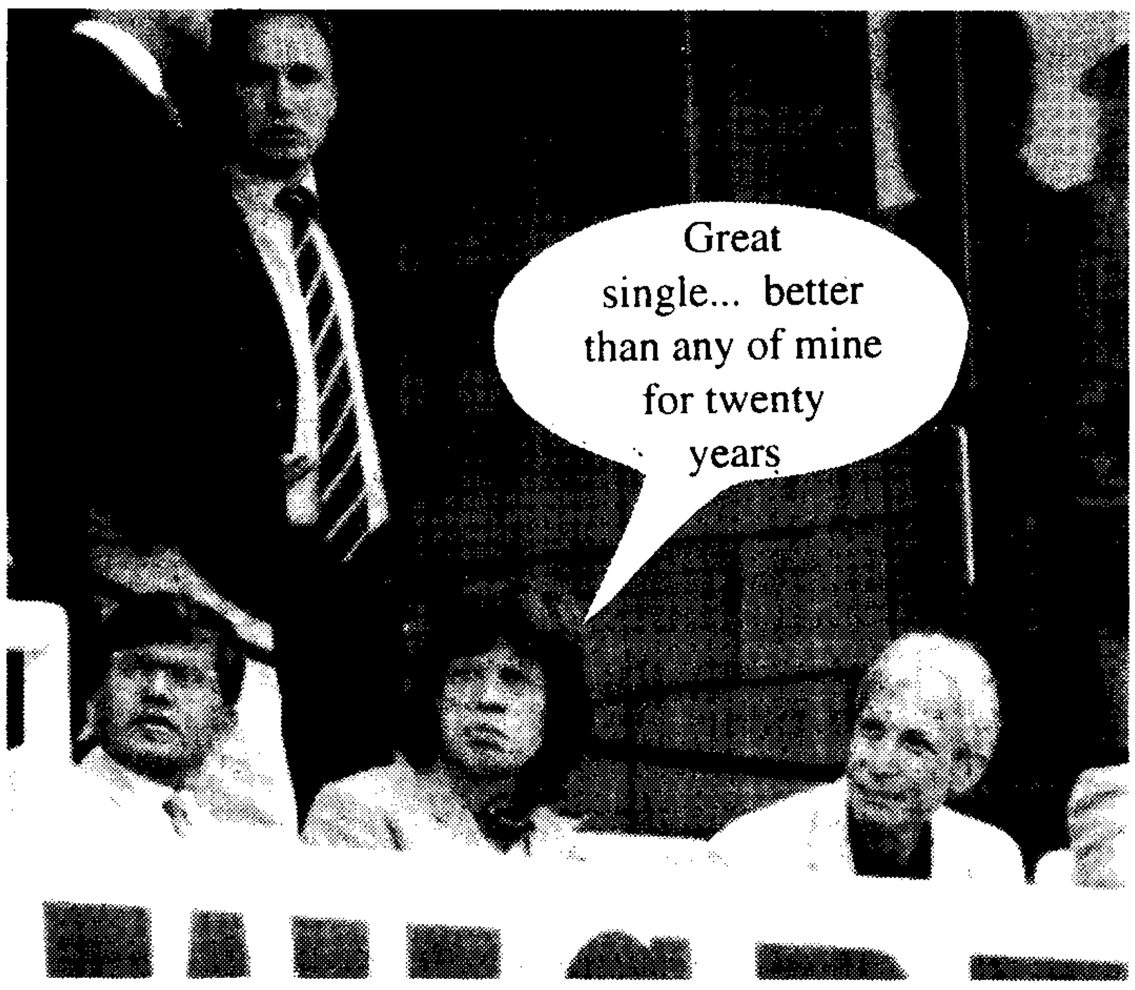
● This indispensable tribute to the People's Princess has been lovingly sculptured by world-acclaimed illuminated wax artist, Sir Andreas Wickham Smith. Watch and weep as the candle slowly burns down and Diana vanishes forever! Limited edition of ten million.

● Plays theme tune from The Simpsons *(Shurely shome mishtake? Ed.).*

Price: 25p per dozen

tems will go to Lord Gnome (100%)

JAGGER BECOMES CRICKET COMMENTATOR



Issued by HM Government

NO MORE TESSAS – NOW IT'S THE GEOFFREY!

SAVERS

Announcing a new scheme to provide tax-free benefits for you and your family (but particularly you).

THE GEOFFREY

HOW IT WORKS

- Simply invest a minimum sum of 12 million pounds in an offshore trust in Guernsey or Bermuda.
- Watch while tax-free money piles up for you and your loved ones!

It's so easy — and you don't even have to resign.

You can put your trust in a Geoffrey — and we'll be blind to it!

BACKBONE TO BE BANNED

Says Government

by Our Agriculture Staff **CJD Booker**

AGRICULTURE Minister Dr Jack Cunningham last night announced a total ban on "spines" in British Government.

"It is better to be safe than sorry," he explained, "and we are confronting a situation where some Labour MPs are showing distressing signs of having a backbone and not following the herd. They are clearly mad and should be taken out and culled.

"Safe MPs are easily distinguished by a yellow streak going through them. These pose no threat to anyone and can be eaten for breakfast by Tony Blair."

Moo Mowlam is 47.

RACE FOR CHRISTMAS NUMBER ONE

by Our Pop Staff **Terry Tubby**

THE race for the Christmas number one publicity slot has started in earnest, with the Teletubbies starting off as the bookies' hot favourites to reach the top and become this yuletide's biggest column-filler.

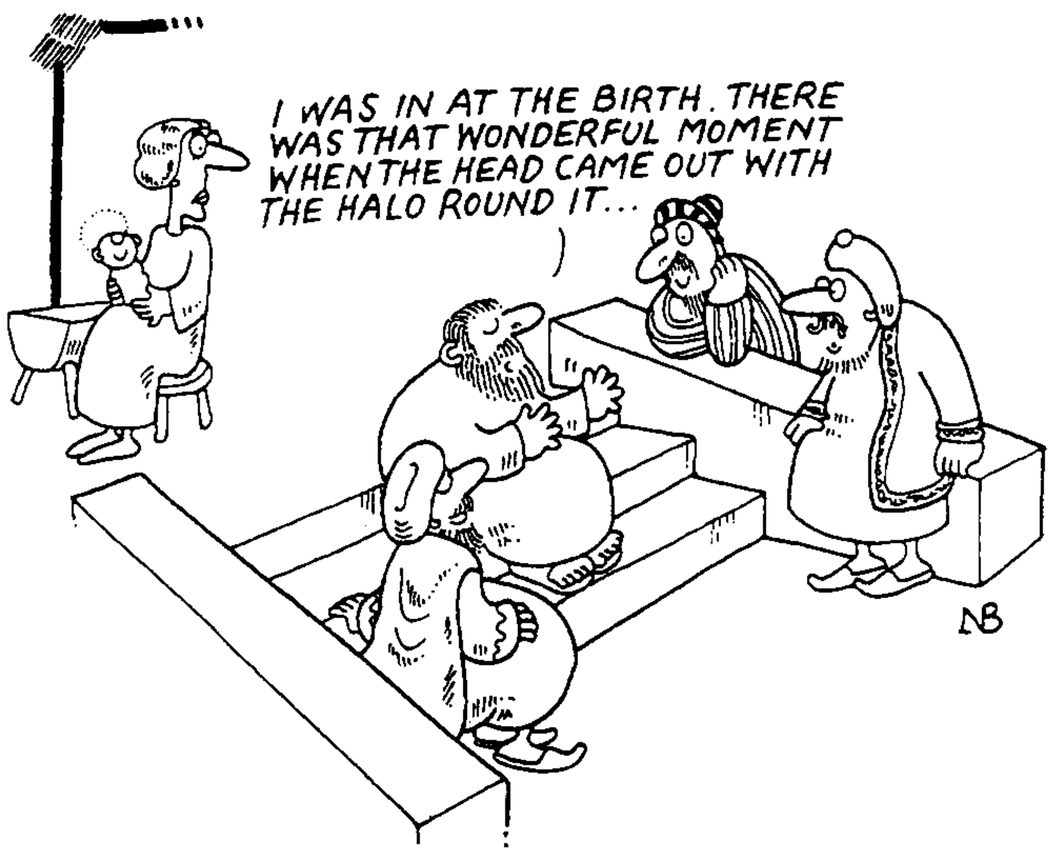
Said a spokesman from the world of publicity: "This Christmas, the feeling in the industry is that the battle of the hype will be between the Spice Girls, the Teletubbies, and the late Diana Spencer". He continued: "Jesus is out of the running, which is not surprising really, when you consider he still uses the same, tired old gimmicks — ie that it's his birthday and there is a religious celebration which happens to fall on the same day as Christmas." *(Reuter)*

NOT ANOTHER CHARITY GALA DINNER, DEBS?
UH-HUH.
I MUST LOOK MY BEST. I'VE GOT A BIG SPEECH TO MAKE TONIGHT.
DAB DAB
ER... YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE MY FOUNDATION IS, DO YOU?
RWANDA, I THINK... OR IS IT BOSNIA?
I THOUGHT IT WAS IN HARLEM FOR DISADVANTAGED TEENAGERS. BETTER RING MY P.R. AND CHECK...

COURT CIRCULAR

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
The State Funeral took place today in St Edna's Cathedral, Sydney, of the late Sir Michael Hutchence INXS, who had lain in state for 24 hours pending an autopsy by Inspector Knackeroo of the New South Wales Illegal Substances and Auto-Erotic Activities Unit. The cortege was attended by Her Royal Highness the Kylie of Minogue, Dame Helena of Christensen and the Dowager Paula of Yates who read A Communication on the Blessed Bob Geldof, whom she described as being personally responsible for the demise of the deceased. She was accompanied by the Royal Infanta, the Heavenly Tiger Lily of Hiraani. The Archdeacon of Sydney, the Very Rev J.C. Flannelwanger, paid tribute to "this extraordinary talent, perhaps the greatest genius of his generation, whom I hadn't heard of until this morning" *(cont'd p 94)*.

Joseph and the Three Wise New Men



Apology

IN common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression at the time of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, that her brother the Earl Spencer was in some way a noble and upstanding figure who was giving the nation a moral lead. Headlines after his speech at his sister's funeral such as "Well Said, Your Lordship", "Top Marks For Spencer — The People's Earl" and "String Up The Windsors — Let's Have The Spencers Instead", may have reinforced the view that we in some way regarded the Earl as a towering moral leader who was giving the British people a new sense of values in their hour of grief.

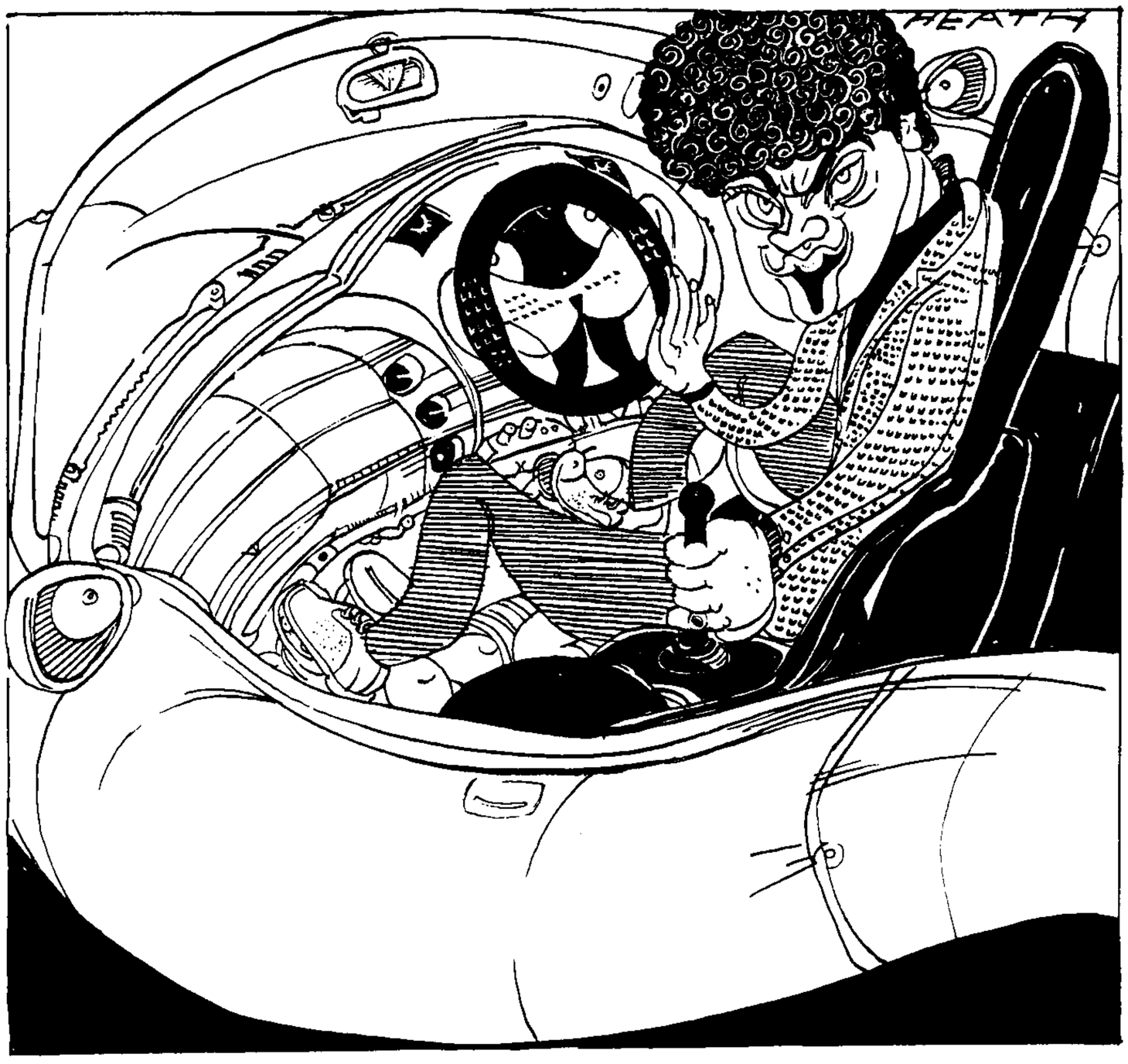
We now recognise that these tributes were entirely without foundation, and constitute a baseless calumny on the reputation of the Earl Spencer as the world's greatest serial adulterer and total bastard.

We say: Come off it, you bonking bully, pay up the money to Vic and don't try coming back to Blighty — 'cos you're not welcome!

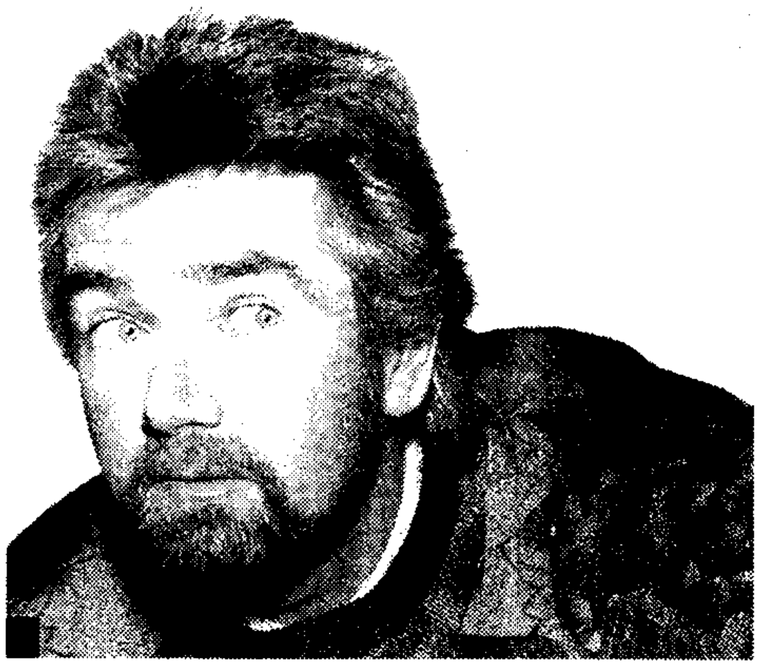
We apologise to our readers for any confusion that our earlier tributes to Earl Spencer may have caused.

Harry Enfield's **Bores** Drawn by **Michael Heath** **27. Top Bore**

"It's made of metal it's got a wheel at each corner what is it? IT'S A CAR! open the door slip into the soft seats & the first thing you notice — IS THE STEERING WHEEL! Put the key in the ignition turn it clockwise — & THE CAR STARTS! The gearleaver has a leather knob & resembles — A BLOKE'S TODGER! Slip it into first ease back on the clutch push down on the accelerator & THE CAR GOES FORWARD! Push your foot down hard & it goes — EVEN FASTER! Put your foot on the brake — & THE CAR SLOWS DOWN! If you want to go from nought to sixty miles per hour in *this* car it'll take you — FIVE POINT TWO SECONDS! & that's faster than an "It" Girl — CAN GET HER KNICKERS OFF! it's got more horses under the bonnet THAN THE GRAND NATIONAL! & three hundred pounds per square foot of torque gives it more pulling power Than Boyzone — IN A ROEDEAN DORMITORY! This is a great big throbbing roaring whanger — OF A CAR! & I for one — WANT TO GO TO BED WITH IT!"



DIARY



NOEL EDMONDS' CHRISTMAS DIARY

There's been a right old merry ding-dong on high! *Stop it, it's hurting*!!! You've gotta giggle, haven't you? 'Cos let's face it, Christmas — hey "Chris", where's the "mouse"?? (forgive the terrible pun!!) — all comes down to telly.

There's morning telly in the bedroom, for when you're unwrapping the old stockings. There's lunchtime telly, for when you're all scoffing the old turkey and trimmings round the kitchen gogglebox. And then there's afternoon and evening telly — for when Dad's dozing off in the corner, the lovely young Fiona is half-naked upstairs snoggin' the bloke next door, and Mum's up to her knees in brandy butter and wrapping paper!! And if you want a "telly good Christmas", as the little Jap bloke might put it, then you need look no further than the special Yuletide edition of *Noel's Christmas Telly Addicts*, coming shortly to a small screen near you.

I'll be asking some very searching questions about the real message behind the historical Christmas. Among the questions I'll be asking the Walton family from Droitwich and the Kemble family from Warrington are: Who got the sprig of holly caught in her bloomers in the 1973 Xmas edition of *On The Buses*? And what was the name of the actor who played Santa in 1981 *Only Fools and Horses Xmas Special*? Ah, Christmas: as the late lamented Jesus once said, it's a time for light entertainment for all mankind.

On a more serious note, a number of people I greatly respect in this industry have turned round to me and said, "You're a marvellous *broadcaster*, Noel, a true *professional* with your trademark beard and *talent for communication* and you've made Christmas your *very own*." To which I turn round and say, "Thanks, fellas — and I'm happy to say that one of my wholly-owned Noel subsidiary companies now owns 100% European broadcast transmission rights to Christmas. We're not talking just Santa Claus here but Jesus Christ and his entire family including crib, innkeeper and livestock. I'm proud to say they're all now the property of 'First No-el plc'." At the moment they're in development for what will prove a very exciting and creative multi-media branded commercial format for a prime-time slot.

Joseph, for instance. In broadcasting terms — and let's face it, we're in the communication game — Joseph is a woefully under-developed character. So let's all turn round and say it, loud and clear: the guy's a weak link. But get in a first-rate gag-writer and a highly professional producer, add a bit, take away a bit, chivvy him up a bit, and your Josephs could be up there with your Cillas and your Beadles. We're after the truly masterly David Jason to play Joseph in the Official Crinkly Bottom Nativi-panto this year, with Pauline Quirke as Mary and Dipsy and La-la from the fabulous Teletubbies — you can't argue with figures — as the farm animals! Great entertainment, very Xmasy, very Noel Edmonds. And — who knows? — we might find ourselves up to a few of our old tricks with a ton of gunge to be unceremoniously dumped on a Wise Man not a million miles from the lovely Patrick Moore — but my lips are sealed! Ooh — you've got me going again! Tee-hee! At this point, I turn into the proverbial giggle-machine!!!

I don't mean this unkindly, but I do find it fascinating to look back on those colleagues I was with in the early days of Radio One and to see what's happened to them all now. Tony Blackburn. Alan Freeman. Pete Murray. Ed Stewart. The word forgotten springs to mind. Believe me, I have the greatest sympathy for them. In those days, I only had the mid-morning weekend slot, and these were broadcasters I looked up to. Now I want to take them to one side, pin back their old lug 'oles and turn around and ask them, "Why did it go down the pan, mate? Where did it all go pear-shaped?" But I'll always try to help them if I can. I've already arranged a booking on the House Party for Tony Blackburn in early March. He's agreed to be tarred and feathered by ordinary members of the public and then thrown naked — except for his toupee! — into a vat of fast-drying red paint! Should be a lot of fun. If you count yourself a professional in this business, you've got to stick by your old mates through thick and thin — or thick and fat, in Ed's case. Sorry, Ed — only kidding!! That's not a dig at Ed, by the way. I just feel sorry for the guy.

Of course, Christmas is traditionally a time for some truly memorable practical jokes from yours truly, the King of the Wind-Up Merchants! Without giving the game away, I've gotta tell you that this Yule we've got some great thoroughly seasonal practical gags we're specially going to perform on you, the ordinary viewing public.

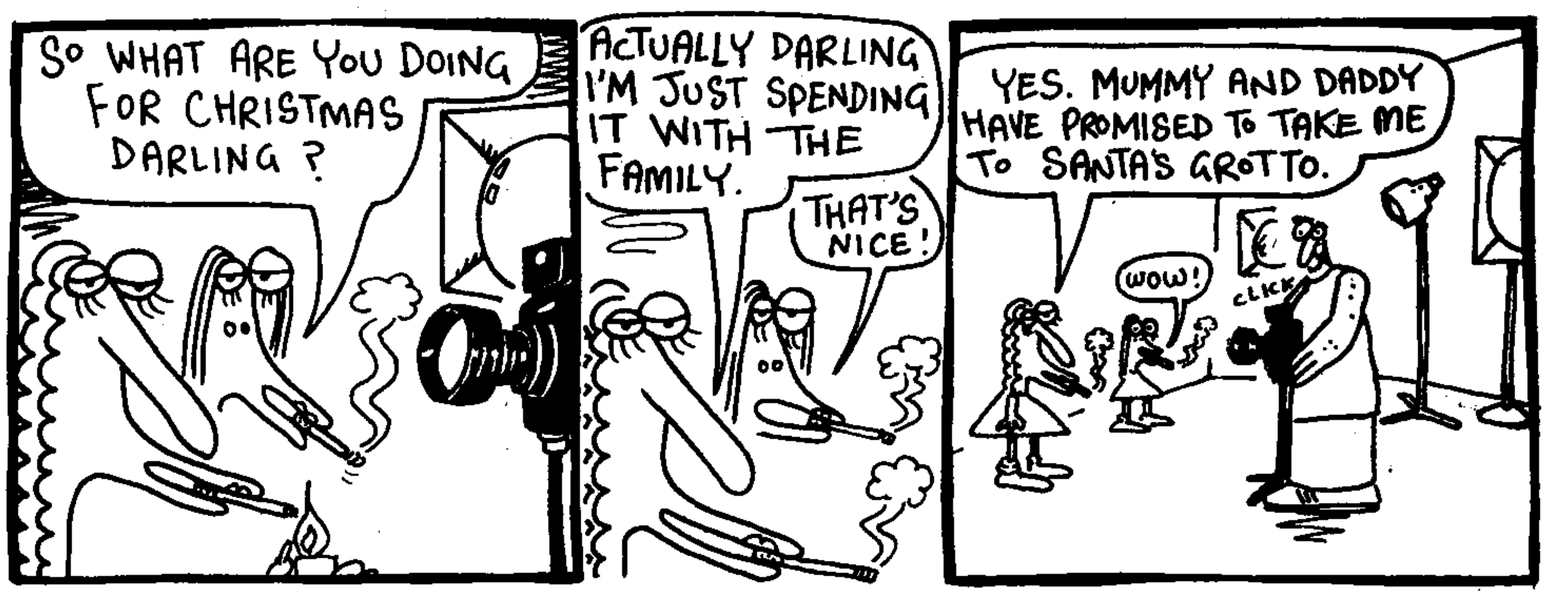
GAG 1: We secretly remove the "DANGER — THIN ICE" from a picture-postcard lake! Then we sit back and watch while the Ormerod family of Chesterfield — Sue, 45, builder Gary, 46, Auntie June, 44, and — one for all you gentlemen in the audience! — lovely teenage daughter Meg, 15 — strap on their skates, march straight into the middle, fall through the ice — *and sink*!!!!! With famous well-known celebrity Barry Ross of TV's *Casualty*, we then spring a Noel-style surprise on Gary, 46, as he languishes in Intensive Care! Dressed in surgeons' uniforms, we enter the ward, pull off our masks — and sing "Freeze a Jolly Good Fellow!", waving the tell-tale sign above our heads. Gotcha, Gary!

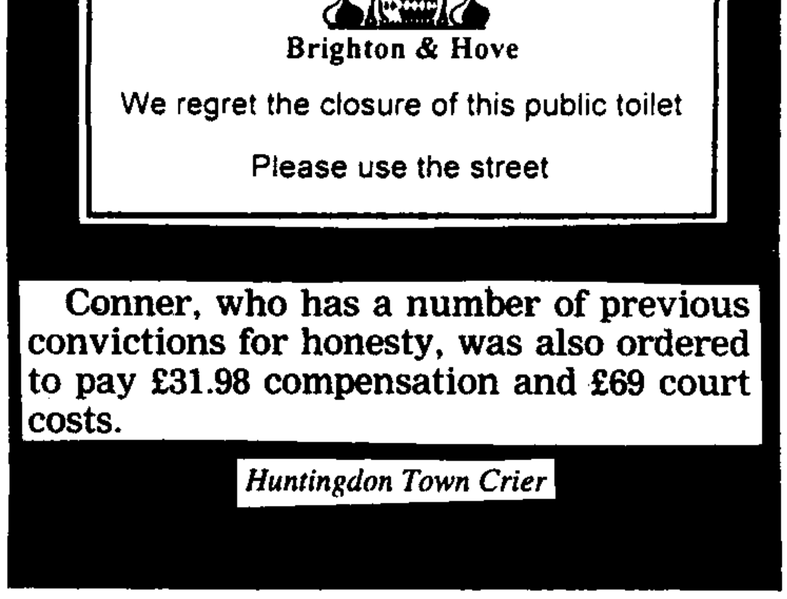
GAG TWO: Blobby, blobby, blobby! Your friend and mine surprises Jack Hasker, 25, an ordinary member of the viewing public as he sits watching telly in his Y-front! Mr Blobby then throws poor old Jack into a bath which we have previously filled with — wait for it! — *dead toads*!!! We then require him to *swallow them* — cheered on by TV celebrity Carol Vorderman! But believe me, Jack — we only do it to people we like!

Blobby-blobby-blobby!!! Tune in on Xmas Day and you'll see him in his most legendary role yet — *Away In A Manger*, starring the Blobby Jesus!!! Love it! "Joyeux No-el"!

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


SO WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR CHRISTMAS DARLING ?
ACTUALLY DARLING I'M JUST SPENDING IT WITH THE FAMILY.
THAT'S NICE!
YES. MUMMY AND DADDY HAVE PROMISED TO TAKE ME TO SANTA'S GROTTO.
WOW!
CLICK



Conner, who has a number of previous convictions for honesty, was also ordered to pay £31.98 compensation and £69 court costs.

Huntingdon Town Crier

Literary Review

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The old penpals' act

BEING asked to name your book of the year is opinionation at its very purest, the strongest hit you can get.

Normally book reviewers are supposed to know a bit about the subject at hand and even put some effort into describing the book they're reviewing. Sometimes reviewers are even required to stoop to a level of humdrum usefulness for readers!

No such demeaning function mars the joy of choosing your book of the year. It's an act of radiant conceit. Once upon a time solidarity was all the rage: log-rolling, back-scratching and arse-licking were taken as the essence of the job. Plenty of old-timers still think so.

Malcolm Bradbury, for example, can absolutely be depended upon to select an alumnus of his dreadful UEA creative writing remedial classes (this time: Rose Tremain). Robert McCrum will choose a pal from Faber (Peter Carey). Frederic Raphael will haply light upon the *Selected Poems of Michel Schmidt*, the man who has just published Raphael's own self-indulgent essays at Carcanet Press.

Others remain highly social partygoers. Christina Odone mwahmwahs Auberon Waugh; Lawrence Norfolk does the decent thing by his good friend Rachel Cusk; Mary Killen sends her respects to her good mate Craig Brown by advertising the collected journalism of his late father-in-law Colin Welch. Seamus Heaney salutes his mate Ted Hughes' *Tales From Ovid*. All *Spectator* contributors wave cheerily at each other, ignoring the world beyond. A.N. Wilson once more alights upon his perpetual favourite, the *Daily Telegraph Book of Obituaries* (this time Vol.3) to send season's greetings to Hugh Massingberd.

In its way all this is nothing but good neighbourliness — the literary equivalent of taking in the milk, feeding the cat, keeping an eye out for strangers in the area, that sort of thing. It's a commoonity, you see, *littracher*. New Labour can only approve. John Major meanwhile chooses a book by one of his remaining friends, Douglas Hurd. Harry Enfield, presumably in similar vein, chooses himself.

And what about those who choose their books of the year two or three or four times, in different papers, giving one just that dizzy sensation one doesn't want at this time of year? Graham Swift, for example, chose a funeral director's diary, *The Undertaking* (as it were Last Orders, what, what?) in both the *TLS* and the *Sunday Times* but industriously managed two quite different tributes. Indecision about this important topic even divides couples. The gifted Ladee Antonia Fraser chose quite different books for the *Guardian*, the *FT*, and the *Sunday Times*. But hubby Harold Pinter delivered exactly the same selection (*Embarrassment of Tyrannies* and *Global Spin*) to the *FT* and the *Guardian* in the same words — although he did reverse the order of the two paragraphs, just the sort of subtle variation for which his plays are so highly esteemed.

Altogether more tragic is the extent to which people choosing books of the year now simply choose reflections of themselves. In both the *Independent* and the *TLS*, bogtrotter-wannabe Terry Eagleton recommended *An Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* from Cork University Press ("it tells you all you need to know about the difference between a raised bog and a blanket bog").

Man-hater and cat-maniac Carmen Callil, even more tragically, chose, in the *New Statesman*, *Mrs Chippy's Last Expedition*, said to be "the story of the cat who accompanied Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1915 Endurance expedition to the South Pole". Miaouw!

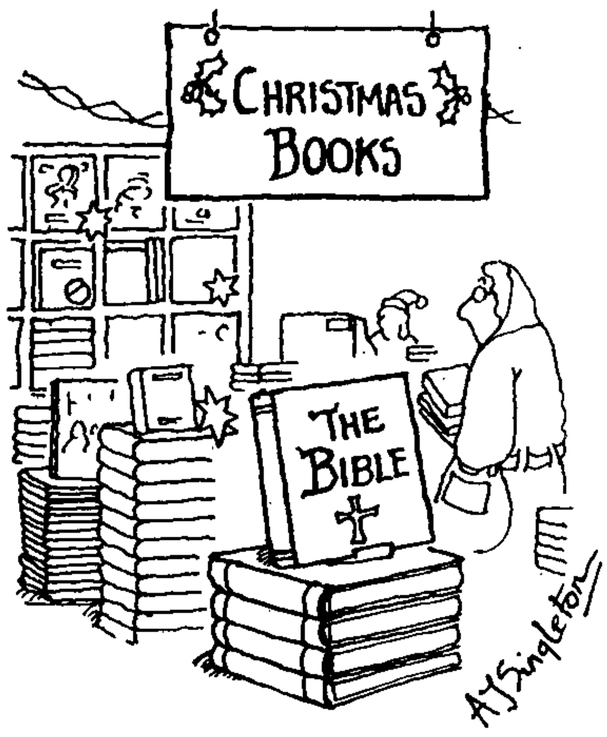
A ridiculous number of this year's contributors stuck firmly to their own obsessions. In the *Independent*, Harry Pearson chose *The Beers of Wallonia*, "an exhaustive survey of the breweries of French-speaking Belgium". In the *Sunday Times*, Matthew Parris cited a hardly less valuable guide to trekking in Bolivia. Poor Sue Townsend picked a *Sciatica Handbook*, while in the *Spectator* one Nicholas Harman informed the public that *The Collins Field Guide to Trees of Britain and Northern Europe* "gave botanical roots to my new oak plantation", arf arf.

Sometimes a few titles put together give a perfect triangulation on the chooser. Thus in the *Mail*, "Lord" Norman St John Stevas chose *The Rebuilding of Windsor Castle* (a pointlessly faked up bit of heritage), *Whatever Happened to the Tories?* (political disaster, with Thatch to blame) and *The Early Life of the Queen Mother* (old queen viewed as if still young). What more does one need to know about Lord Norman?

Composting down all the nominations, this year's winner was Ian McEwan's novel *Enduring Love*, followed by *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth, *Mason and Dixon* by Thomas Pynchon, *The Reader* by Bernard Schlink, *Jack Maggs* by Peter Carey, and *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels.

Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen* and the second volume of Doris Lessing's memoirs, *Walking in the Shade*, were the most popular biographical titles. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Martin Amis's *Night Train* only found three or four takers a piece.

Much the most remarkable fact about this year was that so many people chose titles from last year now in paperback — particularly Orlando Fige's history of the Russian Revolution, *A People's Tragedy*, and Norman Davies's *Europe: History*. Or from next year: the second or third most popular novel was Don DeLillo's vast *Underworld* which is not published here until January. This was perfect for show-offs, even though many patently hadn't actually read it. Robert McCrum claimed to be halfway through and said "on the basis of what I've read so far it feels safe to predict that this wonderfully ambitious novel... will probably be chosen as one of the great novels of 1998, perhaps of the Nineties". It's not every day you actually catch them at it, is it?



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

□NEWSPAPER readers are well aware that books of the year selections are the result of friendly back-scratching. What they may be less aware of is the commercial back-scratching that informed the Sunday Times Christmas Books supplement "produced in association with Dillons The Bookstore".

The books appearing in this supplement were not chosen by the Sunday Times but by Dillons for its Christmas catalogue, each entry in which was paid for by publishers. (The Times also had a Dillons supplement, but managed to make some selections of its own.)

Perhaps this neat arrangement explains the rigour of the Sunday Times' comments about each title. The President's Daughter — by Jack Higgins, for goodness' sake — was "action packed"; Tim Graham's Diana: Princess of Wales was "a fitting tribute to a special Princess"; and the recipes in Two Fat Ladies Ride Again read "mouth-wateringly well". As for Dillons, it offered "a veritable feast for the book lover". (Even the Private Eye Annual was feted for its "rapier wit". Ed.)

■ *THERE is no room for scholarly editor-in-chief Peter Carson at the new, Birtist Penguin. He is leaving at Christmas.*

But the head Birtist himself, managing director Anthony Forbes Watson, may himself be vulnerable. He does not get along with his boss, chief executive officer Michael Lynton.

'Bookworm'

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footnotes

WHIPS CROSS

A LOOMING danger in "new" Labour's campaign to root out corruption in "old" Labour councils is the boomerang effect: that the investigators will end up in their own back yard.

A good example is the determined effort by the party's national executive committee (NEC) to expose the "Donnygate" scandal in Doncaster. Allegations about the designation of green belt land for development" to the advantage of big property firms have led to the suspension of the entire Doncaster Labour party pending an NEC inquiry.

A key member of the inquiry team is Kevan Jones, chief whip of the Labour group on Newcastle city council, and a close friend and disciple of Labour's chief whip in the Commons, Nick Brown, MP for Newcastle East.

Kevan Jones and his fellow investigators will be looking closely at the grandiose plans to develop 2,300 acres, most of it in green belt land near the pit village of Rossington. The plans provide for an international golf course, massive office developments, exclusive and expensive private housing and tree plantations to screen off the unsightly pit and village.

Somehow this grotesque plan got planning permission from Doncaster metropolitan borough council and was only stopped on appeal to a government inspector. When he investigates Rossington Hall Investments, the property company involved, Mr Jones from Newcastle will recognise the company chairman, Mr Douglas Hall from Newcastle, son of the millionaire property developer Sir John Hall.

KEVAN JONES

NICK BROWN

Douglas Hall's close friend and fellow director of Newcastle United Football Club is millionaire property developer Freddy Shepherd, whose controversial proposals for a 30,000 square foot superstore development at Walkergate in Newcastle's impoverished East End has been enthusiastically supported by council chief whip Kevan Jones, and by the MP for Newcastle East, chief whip Nick Brown.

Reed shaken

ALEX REED

■ ALEX REED, executive chairman of Reed Personnel plc, is a personal friend and hero of the prime minister — and not only because he made a personal donation of £100,000 to the Labour party.

Reed has been brought in to Downing Street to advise Tony Blair on the employment of teachers, and his company has just won a juicy contract to prepare Labour's "welfare to work" programme in Hackney. Like so many of Blair's "welfare to work" heroes, Mr Reed and his company have a record of sending people the opposite way — from work to welfare, and even, a recent case suggests, of trying to keep them there.

Fiona Reith started working in the catering division in Reeds in 1993 and was quickly promoted to operations director. In January this year, Reed executive Martin Fallon told her she was redundant .

Discussions dribbled on about an alternative. When, finally, she was offered a new post with a 30 percent salary cut, she left Reed and got a new job with another recruitment firm. In March she got a letter from Reed warning her that unless she stopped contacting her old clients she would be issued with a writ. The letter stung her to sue Reed for unfair dismissal. The case came to an Edinburgh industrial tribunal on 27 October. The unanimous decision was that she had been unfairly dismissed. She continues to work for Reed's competitor, but for some reason the writ threatened by Blair's hero has not materialised.

REVENGE IS SWEET

■ AN interesting example of a company "doing a Bernie" (ie transferring business contributions from the Tories to Labour) is the sugar giant Tate & Lyle.

In 1994 the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food (COMA) circulated a draft report from its sub-committee on cardio-vascular disease mildly advocating a "balanced diet". As usual, the committee recommended eating more vegetables and less salt and sugar.

In the past such recommendations were worded in fairly meaningless percentages (ie "eat 10 percent less fat"). The 1994 report was more specific, however, listing typical meals and explaining how in practice to cut down on fatty or sugary substances.

The manufacturers took fright that the new document might actually succeed in its purpose. A meeting at the department of health, presided over by the then parliamentary under secretary of state Baroness Cumberledge, was attended by anxious representatives of the biscuits, confectionary and sugar industry, including Tate & Lyle. The man from Tate & Lyle asked for the report to be changed back into the usual anodyne style. If changes were not made, he suggested, his company's attitude to the Tory party might change.

Professor Michael Marmot, who wrote the report, was consulted. He insisted that the report should go out as written and it did. In 1994-95, Tate & Lyle's contribution to the Tory party was cut from £25,000 to £15,000, and for the first time anyone could remember the Labour party got some sugar money — £7,500 (and the Lib Dems £2,500). These contributions stayed the same in 1995-96, but in 1997, election year, Tate & Lyle made no political contributions at all. This was a severe blow to the Tories, who got a useful £50,000 from Tate & Lyle in the last election year — 1992.

Neither Rimer nor reason

■ CAN you spot the difference between the following two decisions of the department of trade and industry (DTI)?

1 No action to disqualify as company directors the convicted criminals in the Guinness affair.

2 Determined and expensive efforts to disqualify four former directors of the defunct arms company Astra Holdings, who have been convicted of, er, nothing.

Gerald James, Astra's former chairman, is energetically fighting the disqualification action, claiming in his defence that his company was victimised by a conspiracy involving intelligence, arms companies and government ministers who objected to James's revelations about illegal arms exports to Iran and Iraq.

The DTI went to court recently to strike out this defence, and submitted a bundle of relevant documents. Whoops! In the bundle was a recommendation from the DTI inspectors (one of whom, Colin Rimer, is now a high court judge) that there should *not* be any disqualification proceedings against any Astra directors. The DTI lawyers were so embarrassed by this document they tried unsuccessfully not to hand it over to Gerald James.

Even the judge seemed puzzled by the decision of DTI ministers to overrule their own inspectors, especially since they had so readily taken the inspectors' advice not to disqualify the much more culpable directors of Guinness.

Perhaps the *Eye* can help. The decision to start disqualification proceedings against Astra was taken in September 1994 when the undersecretary at the DTI in charge of corporate affairs was the celebrated liar and cheat Neil Hamilton. Hamilton's closest friend and ally was the former MP for Cannock and Burntwood (now MP for Aldershot) Gerald Howarth. Howarth was a former director of another arms company and a parliamentary consultant to Astra, who turned sharply against Gerald James when the latter decided to spill the beans about Iraqgate to a parliamentary select committee in 1992.

Stagecoach: The great train robbery

■ STAGECOACH, the company that holds you up, is getting away with two big bags of loot swiped from the public purse.

The latest six months profits figures show that Stagecoach's subsidiary, Porterbrook, which leases locomotives and coaches to the railway companies, had an income of £136m, of which almost half — £62.7m — was clear profit.

There are two reasons for this amazing profiteering.

1 The price the Tory government charged for Porterbrook was absurdly low.

2 The contracts the Tory government forced British Rail to sign with the railway companies gave the three rolling stock companies (Porterbrook, Eversholt and Angel) a licence to print money.

So £62.7m of Stagecoach profit in six months is directly attributable to ripping off the taxpayer. How does the government respond? By giving Stagecoach directors another £60.3m a year subsidy so they can make still more profit from the late-running and shoddily-serviced South West Trains.

ORDER OF MERRITT

NEIL MERRITT

■ THE growing army of admirers of Roger Ward and the Association of Colleges may not appreciate the full extent of their hero's greatest triumph — at the University of Portsmouth.

Ten years ago, when the university was plain old Portsmouth Poly, Professor John Pickering, a distinguished academic from Manchester, was appointed vice president. In May 1990, the poly president died. The university advertised for a successor. Prof Pickering applied, was shortlisted, interviewed by a properly-formed committee and was told he'd got the job, subject to ratification by the governors. His appointment was publicly announced on 3 August and he took charge.

In September he attended a conference in Huddersfield where he met Roger Ward, then chief executive of a new organisation representing the newly "incorporated" (ie privatised) colleges — the Polytechnic Colleges Employers Forum (PCEF).

Ward congratulated Pickering on his appointment and warned him of weaknesses in the contract he'd been offered. Pickering raised these weaknesses with the poly governors. An unconstitutional meeting was arranged where some governors, mostly local businessmen, ranted and railed against Pickering. A campaign was launched against Pickering's ratification. In October 1990, the governors' meeting did not ratify Pickering and the post was advertised again. Pickering applied, but was not shortlisted.

A surprising name on the new shortlist was Neil Merritt, then principal of Ealing College, west London, and chairman of the PCEF. Merritt had not even been shortlisted when he'd previously applied for the job. He was, however, instantly popular with the businessmen on the governors' board, and was very much the favourite son of the Polytechnic Colleges Employers' Forum. The four leading officers of PCEF at the time were the chairman, Neil Merritt, the vice-chairman, Peter Knight, principal of Birmingham Poly, chief executive Roger Ward, and secretary John Hall, then a partner in London solicitors Wedlake Saint.

BONNIE TALL

Mr Merritt — he was an "ad hominem" professor at Ealing but Portsmouth didn't recognise the title — was enthusiastically assisted into the new job by his colleagues at PCEF. The "assessor" appointed by Portsmouth Poly governors to help them choose the right man for president was Peter Knight, Merritt's vice chairman at PCEF. Knight's fee, negotiated by Roger Ward, was £3,000. The complicated legal work necessary to dump Prof Pickering was taken on by John Hall of Wedlake Saint, at a fee of £2,282. Merritt was duly appointed and took up his post in the autumn of 1991. Prof Pickering was appointed his deputy. In 1992, Portsmouth Poly became Portsmouth University, and Merritt and Pickering became vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor.

Mr Merritt set about his new job with all the gusto of the modern quangocrat. He pioneered the eight and half day week — five days full-time on the Portsmouth vice-chancellor's salary of £75,000 a year plus Jaguar, plus another three and a half days (for another £17,000 a year) as chairman of Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust.

His wife Jean, a full-time headmistress in London, was appointed to the board of the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust from a field of 1,500 candidates. The NHS trust was chaired by Victor Jenner, chairman of the university governors who'd appointed her husband. In due course, the Merritts' daughter Hannah got a job as a trainee solicitor at Eversheds, the second biggest solicitors' firm in the country, which had taken on a new partner, John Hall, formerly of Wedlake Saint.

Delighted with all this success, Mr Merritt applied himself energetically to fiddling his travelling expenses. When a juicy freebie of a foreign trip came up, he shopped round bucket shops for cheap economy class fares. He then bought the most expensive Club Class ticket he could find, charged it up to the university, and cashed it in with the airline, netting a profit at the taxpayer's expense of about £500 a time. This happened twice at least, and would have gone on forever if Merritt's secretary, Mrs Bonnie Tall, who took an old-fashioned view about ripping off the university, had not told the finance officer.

Five governor/businessmen, Stuart Waring (local builder), Nick Jonas (ex-IBM), Sir Charles Tidbury (ex-Whitbreads), Charles Brims (Portsmouth and Sunderland Newspapers), and John Macmillan (Grant Thornton) took charge of the allegations and secretly reprimanded Merritt. Phil Hilling, a local partner in the accountants Ernst & Young, internal auditors to the university, was brought in. He agreed that the matter should be kept quiet and settled with a secret reprimand. When Prof Pickering pointed out that a technician had been summarily sacked for a trivial fiddle, Mr Hilling replied that "the way the most senior person in an organisation is dealt with will inevitably be different than for more junior people", and that he was "more inclined to assume a senior person innocent until proved guilty than a more junior person".

Hilling's report was quickly accepted by the university audit committee, and by early 1994 Mr Merritt reckoned he had got away with his fiddling. He decided to buy a house in Portsmouth, and told his solicitor he would need a 90 percent mortgage, and was hoping for a fixed interest rate for 10 years. "My bank (Lloyds) has offered this sum," he wrote in March 1994. "I'll now get moving on this — at present it's an informal offer which will be confirmed 'cos we put £70m of business their way each year"!

Merritt then moved against Pickering. By September 1994, at huge expense, Pickering was forced out of the university as "redundant". Merritt thought he was safe at last, but once again reckoned without Bonnie Tall, who resigned and went to the press with documents proving the fiddling and exposing the cover-up. A public scandal blew up. Merritt resigned in December 1994. A report was commissioned at vast expense from London barrister Jeremy Lever which criticised Merritt, Ernst & Young and the governors. Bonnie Tall sued the university for constructive dismissal and won a unanimous tribunal verdict that the university had breached its elementary duty of trust to her. She got £10,000 compensation. The tribunal observed that her case should never have been contested — an implied rebuke to the Portsmouth solicitors advising the university, Blake Lapthorne, whose partner Caroline Williams currently chairs the university governors.

VICTOR JENNER

STUART WARING

The strenuous efforts of the cost-cutting, streamlining PCEF, later CEF and now AOC, had helped replace a competent and popular vice-chancellor with an expense-fiddler who lasted only three years; to bring the university into prolonged disrepute and to run up a bill for the taxpayer in lawyers' and accountants fee, pay-offs (including £52,500 to the fiddler himself), wasted staff time, etc, of about £1m. The Tory government was impressed. Dr Peter Knight, the former assessor who is now vice-chancellor of the University of Central England, got the CBE in 1995. So did Roger Ward.

TEC Mates (contd)

■ NOTHING better describes the high standards of training and enterprise councils (TECs) than the recent report of the West Wales TEC which discloses payments of £465,000 to the Education Business Partnership, director C.N. Jones, chief executive of the TEC.

Mr Jones was not the only TEC director whose company got pay-outs from the TEC (taxpayer): £604,000 was doled out to Pembrokeshire College "for the provision of training". The principal of the college, Mr I. Morgan, was sitting on the TEC board, as was Mr D. Fellows, a college governor.

Another lucky company was Pembrokeshire Business Initiative, one of whose directors is TEC director M. Hyslop. Mr Hyslop is also general manager of the Milford Haven Port Authority, which so impressed the seafaring community with its handling of the Sea Empress disaster.

The Careers Business Company got £542,000 "for the provision of careers guidance", a grant which caused nothing but pleasure to four directors of the company, I.H. Rees, I.P. Spratling, A.R. Klinck and of course C.N. Jones, all directors of the TEC. Mr Jones and Mr Hyslop also sit on the board of Cwmni Gyrfaoedd Careers Company which got £215,000 from the TEC.

And just in case their colleague on the TEC board, S.A. Ramsey-Williams, felt left out, his partnership was lobbed £215,000 "for the provision of training". As the parable has it: "What the right hand giveth, the left hand happily taketh".

You can write to Paul Foot at 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 0171 287 3183

In the City

TREASURY minister Geoffrey Robinson has so far helped an offshore family trust to receive dividends approaching £350,000 free of tax — a figure likely to be swelled by a further £200,000 when TransTec, the engineering company he founded, pays a final dividend next year.

Since the Orion Trust in Guernsey became a TransTec shareholder last September it has received or is eligible for three dividend payments on its shareholding — an interim and final on its initial investment of 9,805,550 shares, and it will soon receive an interim dividend on the increased 12,755,550 stake.

Because it is an offshore trust established by a non-British taxpayer (Robinson's Madame Bountiful, Joska Bourgeois), Orion Trust would not normally be liable for UK tax even though it was set up for the Robinson family. Tax would only be payable if they directly received benefits.

These dividends are therefore an immediate tax free benefit which Orion Trust has received and on which, thanks to the paymaster-general, tax has legally been avoided. In the future the trust would be able to sell the shares free of capital gains tax — and longer term the £12.5m plus investment looks likely to also escape inheritance tax — the biggest headache for multi-millionaires like Robinson approaching 60, especially with a Labour government eager to close up the loopholes which make inheritance tax payable only by the public spirited or the poorly advised.

That the richest man in the Labour government should engage in what is euphemistically termed "tax efficient" steps to avoid or minimise tax is no surprise. Many other prominent Labour supporters do the same either at a personal or a corporate level.

What makes Robinson and Orion Trust different is the mega-hypocrisy of a minister whose department is looking to crack down on other people's tax avoidance.

"Honestly, I'd love to help you out but all my money's off-shore!"

Consider the facts. Last year TransTec (chairman: G. Robinson) raised almost £58m to takeover BSK Holdings. It did this via a 5 for 9 rights issue at 103p a share against a market price then around 121p. At this time Robinson had an interest in 17,650,000 TransTec shares all held in his own name and was the largest shareholder with 18.5 percent.

The rights issue offered Robinson the chance to buy another 9,805,550 shares at a discount. To take up the shares would have cost £10.1m, no small sum even for a millionaire. And these shares, like the existing holding, would be fully liable to UK tax. Moreover, the rights or shares could not simply by transferred to a trust or offshore. Such transfers would be taxable on the full amount. But if Robinson did not take up the shares his stake in TransTec would be greatly diluted.

Robinson had three choices: take up the rights and increase his UK taxed holding; sell the rights and not take up the shares; arrange for the rights to be taken up by a friendly buyer. What happened next is what has made the treasury minister so vulnerable to criticism.

TransTec told the Stock Exchange on 20 June 1996 that chairman Robinson "has undertaken to subscribe in full for his entitlement". Well he did and he didn't. First Robinson sold the rights to himself in corporate form — Stenbell, a company formed earlier in 1996. The rights were selling at a premium of 7p to 18p a share so Robinson could have made a profit of from £700,000 to £1.75m. On this he faces a capital gains tax bill.

Stenbell then took up the rights and bought the 9.8m shares. This deal was completed by 2 August when it was notified to the Stock Exchange. But on 3 September Stenbell (shareholder: G. Robinson), which is UK taxable, sold all the TransTec shares to Orion Trust (discretionary beneficiary: G. Robinson). This deal, like the purchase of the rights by Stenbell, was said by Robinson to have been done at the (unstated) market price, TransTec's market price that day was 112.5p, and at "arms-length". Very short arms!

That deal was not notified to the Stock Exchange, presumably because it did not alter the overall Robinson shareholding. But what is interesting, considering that first Stenbell and then Orion had to find more than £10m, was that since the Stenbell purchase all Robinson's TransTec shares have been held in the nominee name of the London branch of a leading Swiss bank, Credit Suisse. Banks often hold shares in their nominee name as security for loans.

So by September last year Robinson had orchestrated a legal transaction whereby an offshore family trust had become the tax free owner of shares worth £10m with a six figure income. No tax had been incurred in this effective transfer of ownership other than whatever tax bills for capital gains might be faced by Robinson or Stenbell which were as nothing to what would have had to be paid had the shares been transferred into an offshore trust, assuming this could have been done without Revenue objection. And Robinson could still count the shares as part of his interest but the Inland Revenue might not.

Robinson could rightly claim that as this was done before he became a minister he was being no more than prudent and breaking no law. However, for Orion Trust to then acquire a further 2,950,000 TransTec shares after the election when he was a treasury minister appears to be putting two fingers up to the party and the public.

If Robinson is merely a "discretionary" beneficiary of Orion Trust why did the supposedly independent trustees decide to invest another up to £3m in his old company? Why not invest in BP or ICI? Surely not because that is not what the "discretionary" beneficiary wanted? If Robinson wanted to increase his holding, why did he not add to his UK taxable stake? Presumably not because the "discretionary" beneficiary wanted to increase the tax free pot of TransTec shares and income? All at a time when chancellor Gordon Brown is planning to curb tax avoidance.

Robinson needs to answer these questions unless he wants to revert to being a private citizen:

1. When was the Orion Trust set up and who are its trustees? **2.** What assets were in the trust prior to the TransTec shares? **3.** Does the trust own the Tuscany villa and the Cannes apartment made available by Robinson to the Blairs? **4.** Who made the decisions to buy the TransTec shares and why did the trust buy from Robinson rather than in the market? **5.** Does Robinson have any power to influence the trustees' decisions either as a trustee, protector or beneficiary of Orion Trust? **6.** Did Mme Bourgeois leave a letter of wishes to the trustees indicating who they were to look to for instructions regarding investments or beneficiaries? **7.** If there is a letter of wishes, what does it say about Robinson? **8.** Why did Robinson sell the rights to Stenbell and Stenbell the shares to Orion rather than Orion buying directly and what were the prices paid? **9.** What was the purpose of this convoluted transaction if not to avoid tax? **10.** How were the Stenbell and Orion purchases financed? **11.** Why are all Robinson's shares now held in a Swiss bank nominee name, and is that related to the share purchases? **12.** Why did Orion Trust rather than Robinson personally buy the 2,950,000 shares this year? **13.** What is the Geoffrey Robinson Personal Settlement which finances Stenbell; when was it set up; what does it own and does it pay UK tax? **14.** What assets are held by the five family trusts established by Robinson in Bermuda six years ago?

While all perfectly legal the TransTec deals might suggest to the unkind that the paymaster-general is a man who, like the notorious New York hotelier Leona Helmsley, believes "only little people pay tax".

'Slicker'

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❖

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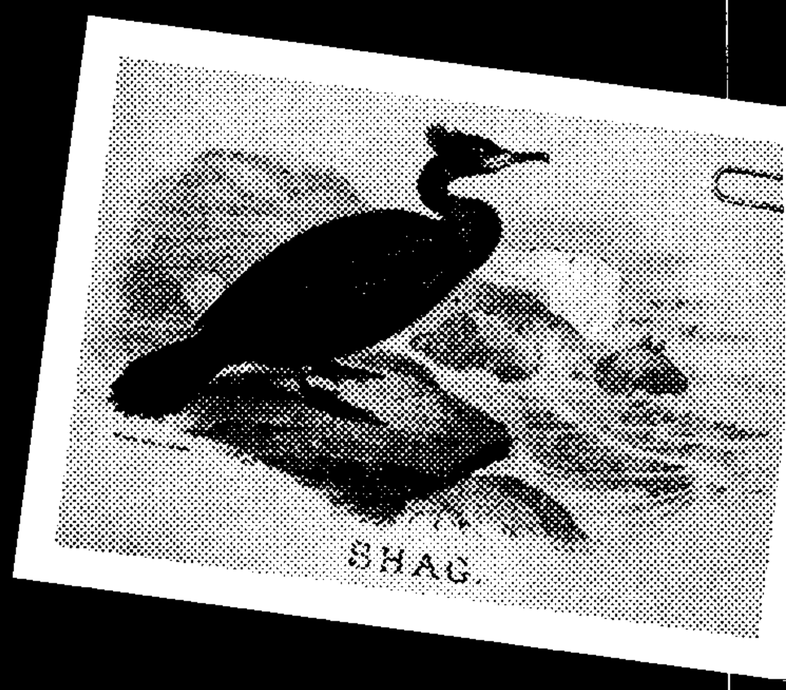

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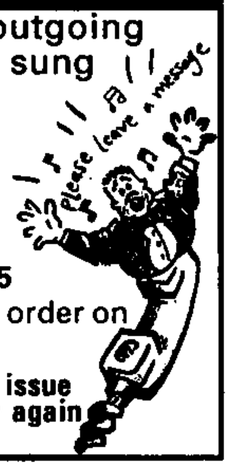

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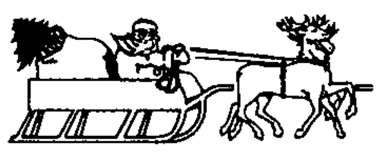

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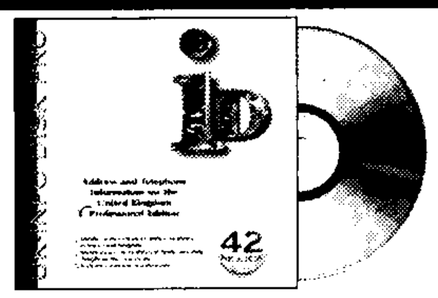

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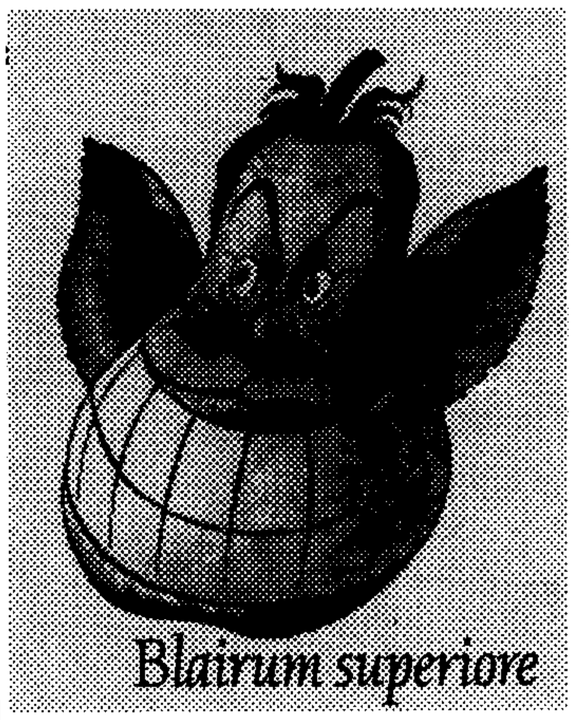

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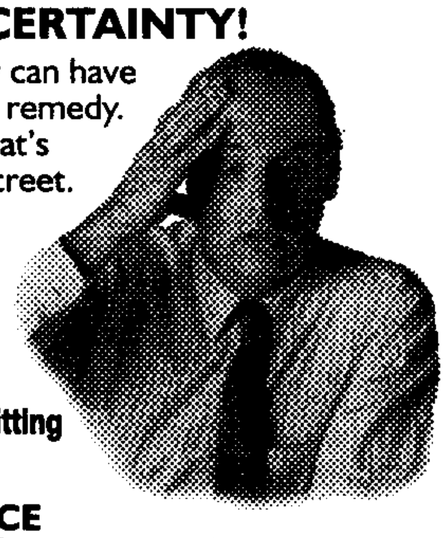

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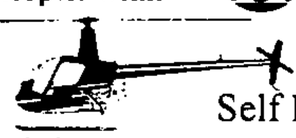

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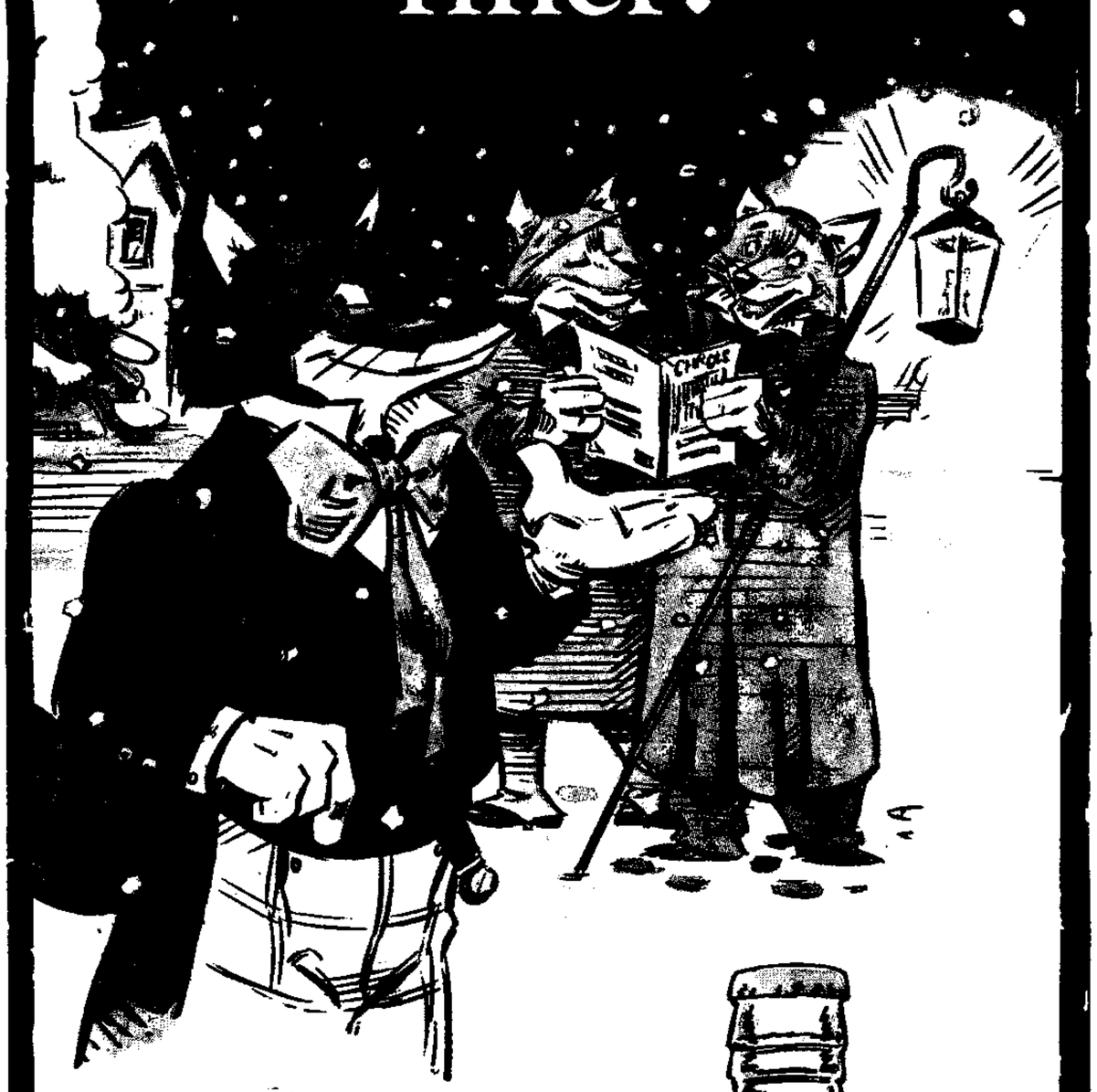

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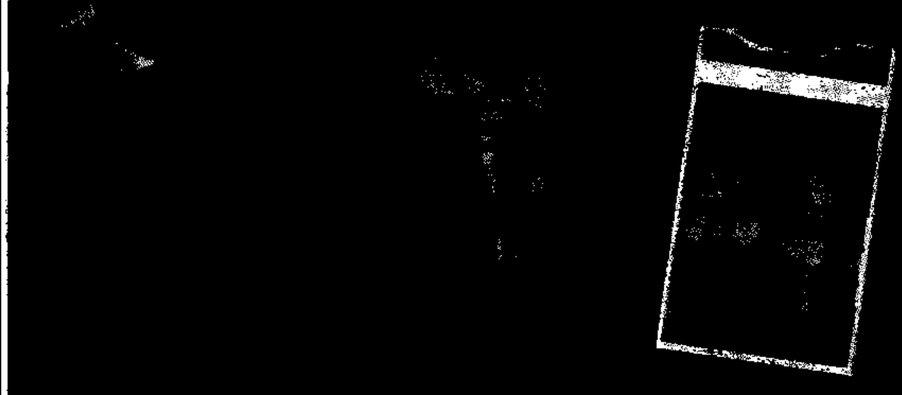

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